University of Alberta

WOMEN'S CONTINUOUS LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

by

©

TARA JANE AMELIA FENWICK

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Educational Administration

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1996

National Library of Canada

Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-612-18036-0

Canada

University of Alberta

Library Release Form

Name of Author: Tara Jane Amelia Fenwick

Title of Thesis: Women's Continuous Learning in the Workplace

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Year this Degree Granted: 1996

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

Tara J. Fenwick

August 16, 1996

18 Nottingham Road
Sherwood Park, Alberta
T8A 5H9

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Women's Continuous Learning in the Workplace** submitted by Tara Jane Amelia Fenwick in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration.

M. Haughey
M. Haughey, Supervisor

L. Beauchamp, Committee Chair

G. McIntosh, Committee Member

Sue M. Scott
S. Scott, Committee Member

E.A. Holdaway
E. Holdaway, Committee Member

D. MacKeracher, Committee Member
University of New Brunswick

Date: August 8, 1996

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the process and meaning of workplace learning for women who describe themselves as "continuous learners". The study asks: How do these women learn, change and grow in the workplace?

Seventeen women participated in a series of reflective conversations in which they recounted their adult work-life biography, using narrative and critical incidents that interpreted the meanings they gave to work experiences which they named as "learning". The conversations were transcribed and analysed inductively to locate patterns and relationships among the women's experiences.

A major finding suggests that thewomen's workplace learnings unfold according to the constitution and intersection of three dimensions: (a) the *intentions* of a woman at a particular time in a particular community; (b) the *disjuncture* between a woman's previous biography of experience and the situation immediately confronting her; and (c) the *positionality* negotiated between the self as knowledge creator and what is perceived to be the "other" -- the text of knowing, which includes elements of an experience, knowledge community, teacher, problematic task, dilemma, or role model.

The study found the process of workplace learning to be recursive and inventive, and strongly influenced by particular workplace conditions. Other themes include the women's search for moral "fit" with a community that shares their sense of what constitutes meaningful work; the women's need for creative freedom in work; the nomadic nature of the women's career paths; the significance of learning in joint-action projects where knowing is improvised according to felt needs which arise; the complexity of the relationship between reflection, doing, and knowing; the women's emphasis on listening to other people and to their "inner voice"; and the significance of learning to

name one's activity, processes, observations and intuitions as a crucial part of becoming a knower in work.

Overall, the study found that the workplace learning women seemed to value most was the development and understanding of self. The study suggests that further research focus on the multiple, shifting, embodied knowings that individuals understand themselves to construct in the workplace, and their constitution of subjectivity through the process of workplace learning.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by fellowships from The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Fund, and the University of Alberta doctoral scholarship. Without this support I would not have been able to interview as extensively nor conduct such in-depth data analysis. These fellowships also enabled me to present this research at several conferences by covering travel costs.

I am indebted to the seventeen remarkable women who shared with me so much of their time and self-reflection to help me understand their work learning and construction of self: Denise, Sarah, Marilyn, Carla, Fran, Elana, Elizabeth, Catherine, Persephone, Liz, Wendy, Carolyn, Kirsten, Janis, Zoe, Audrey, and Nancy. Whatever richness and power this study may have is due largely to the insights and life stories of these women.

Several friends and colleagues collaborated with me throughout the process of interpreting data, writing and rewriting this thesis. Dr. Jim Parsons spent many evenings listening to me talk through ideas and reviewing my writing over the three-year period of this research. For his critical questions, advice and encouragement, thank you. Beth Lang Christenson challenged me to think in new directions, Marilyn Stecyk challenged me to integrate my deepest beliefs with the research process, and Barb Maheu provided much support and advice through the darker periods of thesis writing. I wish also to thank those who provided helpful comments and questions when I presented the findings of this research at conferences of the Adult Education Research Conference, the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education, and the Canadian Society for the Study of Education. Many adult educators with whom I worked in the Certificate program for Adult and Continuing Education have also been very helpful through their discussions and journal writing about ideas directly related to this research. Finally, I wish to thank members of Dayspring Presbyterian Church, especially Esther Link, for listening and encouraging me throughout the process.

Special thanks go to the members of my advisory committee. Dr. Larry Beauchamp and Dr. Gordon McIntosh spent hours reviewing drafts of this thesis, providing comments and other practical assistance that were invaluable in its completion. Dr. Sue Scott personally introduced me to a wide community of scholars in adult education, and is responsible for first interesting me in studying workplace learning. Dr. Dorothy MacKeracher, whose own research on women's workplace learning was helpful in interpreting the data for this study, gave up a good portion of her summer to review the thesis.

Finally to my advisor, Dr. Margaret Haughey, I wish to extend a special acknowledgment. Margaret assisted me in obtaining fellowships, shared with me many helpful resources and discussions over the ten years I have known her and her work, involved me in research projects that taught me much about how to do research, and worked hard to help me finish this document.

And to my family, Gerry, Audrey, Jennifer, Robert, and Jamie, who lovingly gave so much understanding and support, thank you.

Table of Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Chapter One
Introduction to the Study 1
- Background to the study
  - Related literature 1
- Coming to the question of the study 2
- Definitions of terms
  - Meanings of "work" and "learning" 3
  - "Work and "the workplace" 3
  - What is "workplace" 3
  - "Learning" 4
- Significance of the study 4
  - Significance to workplace educators 4
  - Significance to researchers in workplace learning 5
  - Significance to managers/administrators 5
  - Significance to women in the workplace 5
- Organization of the Thesis 5

Chapter Two
Questioning the Literature Related to Workplace Learning 7
A Typology of Approaches to Workplace Learning 7
- Group One:
- Promoting "learning organizations" 7
- Group Two
  - Providing continuing education for workers 8
- Group Three
  - Challenging the workplace learning agendas 9
- Group Four
  - Exploring learning processes in the workplace 10
- Summary
  - Implications and issues arising from the literature 11

A Critical Analysis of "Continuous Learning" Literature 12
- Seven points of critique in the continuous learning literature 12
  - 1. The organization as the learning site 13
  - 2. The role of managers and educators 14
  - 3. The nature of "learners" 15
  - 4. Problem-solving and instrumental knowledge 16
  - 5. Continual learner deficit 17
  - 6. Reflection and critical reflection 18
  - 7. Dialogue 20
- Questions arising from the critique of continuous learning literature 21

Chapter Three
The Process of the Study 23
- The participants

Choosing the women 23

The participants

Demographics of the women 26

The approach

Discovering the complexity of autobiography as research method 27
Autobiography and context 28
Autobiography and the researcher 29

The procedure of the research

Unfolding relationships 30
Research conversations 31
First conversations 32
Reflecting on early conversations 33
Later conversations 34
Using critical incident technique 34
Ensuring data trustworthiness 36
Data analysis 38
The researcher's relationship with the researched 40
Ethical considerations 42

Chapter Four
Life-Stories of Women and Their Learning in the Workplace 43

Denise

Learning structures, goals, and stubborn determination 43

Wendy

Learning to go it alone, after thriving in a workplace community 48

Nancy

Learning to be a maverick and ask the tough questions 51

Persephone

Learning through questing, listening, and connecting 55

Elizabeth

Learning to survive as a critical thinker in a rigid bureaucracy 58

Carla

Learning to build community of excellence, service and accountability 61

Carolyn

Learning how to listen and help 65

Zoe

Learning who is Zoe and what is her purpose 68

Fran

Learning to go through a door where nothing would look the same again 71

Elana

Learning to stretch the job to let her grow 74

Liz

Learning to integrate spirit, passion, home, and work in a journey to find self 78

Marilyn

Learning to be still and wait to find the way to an authentic self 82

Kirsten

Learning to live with the limits and find the right balance 85

Catherine

Learning her own power and finding her place as empower-er 88

Sarah

Learning to trust her own competence and embrace the adventure of learning 90
Audrey
Learning to find peace in her own way of learning 92
Janis
Learning to trust, nurture, and delight in the self 95
Conclusion 98

Chapter Five
Intentionality: Choosing Passion through Continuous Seeking, Challenge, and Moral Integrity 99
Intention in Workplace Learning 99
Seeking creative challenge and risk in work 100
Looking for creative challenge in work outside the job 102
Giving up and moving to a new job for creative challenge 102
Mooring the longing for challenge and change
seeking security and structure 103
Choosing work that integrates a moral purpose 105
Being called to a purposeful vocation 106
Creating or uncovering a vision of purpose 107
Choosing work that serves people 109
Choosing to aim for excellence 110
When purpose is blocked 111
Seeking passion 112
Intention
Choosing to Continue Seeking in Work, Learning, and Life 113
Sustaining and making sense of continuous searching as a life intention 115
What women do not seek in work 116
Workplace learning and the intention of seeking 116

Chapter Six
Disjuncture: Interrupting and Awakening 118
Disjuncture in Workplace Learning 118
Choosing to create disjuncture 119
Listening for discrepancy 119
Becoming awake
Slowing down to attend to the moment 120
Stepping out
Taking risks and trying projects 121
Seeing it "slant"
Asking why questions 122
Seeking alternate perspectives
Listening to other points of view 123
Choosing to reflect on experience 124
Reflecting retrospectively
Replaying the "dailies" 125
Owning mistakes
Learning when things go wrong 126
Critical reflection and self-assessment
Transformative learning 127
When 'reflecting' becomes 'second guessing' 128
Choosing the struggle to learn
Going through the gateway of disjuncture 129

Moving through the pain
Remembering self-confidence 130
Confronting disjunctures early in a career
Ordeal by fire 131
Inventing processes and structures
Navigating the disjuncture 132
Finding supportive listeners 134
Choosing a stance to the disjuncture
A question of identity 135
Resisting the disjuncture
Defense and protection 135
Blind spots and ink blots
Who are allowed to be the picture makers? 137
Disjuncture: Seeking Freedom from Difficulty and New Imaginative Possibilities 138

Chapter Seven
Positionality: Power and Presences 142
Positionality in Workplace Learning 142
Choosing a position of tact
Opening to the presence of "otherness" 142
Choosing an open position to a superordinate 142
Choosing and opening to the presence of a role model 143
Choosing a path through apprenticeship 143
Choosing an open position to a colleague
Being listened to 145
Choosing an adversarial position
Power, interests, value differences, and self-protection 146
Seeking a fit
Choosing to belong to the community 148
Choosing a position in a community that fits best
Adaptor or Innovator 148
Adaptors: Accepting and accommodating to the organization 149
Innovators: Questioning and re-inventing the essence of the organization 150
Struggling to fit when there seems to be no satisfactory fit 152
Positionality, scope of responsibility, and perspective 154
The job definition and its positionality 154
Coming to a position of "big picture" perspective 155
How big picture thinking evolves 156
Positionality, community connectedness and learning in the workplace 157
Moving from community connectedness to alienation within the workplace 157
Choosing to dis-connect from the community 159
Moving from alienation to community connectedness 160
Choosing interdependent connectivity in a workplace community 161
Positionality: Power, Participation, Place, and Personal Agency 162
Positionality and participation in a community of practice 164
Positionality and a sense of place 164
Positionality and interests 165
Positionality and personal agency 166
Positionality of tact 167
Intention, Disjuncture, and Positionality
The Relationships 168

Chapter Eight

The Self in Work: Nurturing and Expressing an Authentic Self in the Workplace 171
Exploring the Self 171
    Coming to know self through work and in workplace communities 172
        Coming to know the power of self
            interpersonal, creative, and rising to challenge 172
        Learning to trust the inner power of "I can..." 173
        Learning to trust the intuitive "voice" 175
        Coming to name her self within the work-world 176
    Confronting the structures and shaking free 177
        Coming-to-know the structures threatening to fix the self 178
        Confronting and struggling against perfectionist standards 179
        Losing one's vocation 180
        The will to power
            The struggle to continue becoming 180
        Asserting the power to rename the structures marking self and work 181
    Returning to an authentic self 183
        Be-coming self
            Accepting continual transition 184
        Letting go the structures of work activity 185
        Finding a core of stability for/in self in a destabilized world 187
        Recognizing and interpreting layers of self 188
        Accepting mystery and interconnectedness
            Spirituality in workplace practice 189
The Significance of Self in Contemporary Theoretical Debates 191
    The self, agency, and society 192
    Theoretical understandings of self in relationship to structures 192
        Understanding the boundaries separating self and other 193
        The postmodern concern
            Language and the illusion of a fixed self 194
        The coherent self 195
        The real self 196
        The self and spirituality 196
    Mothering the self 197
Connecting Self to Intention, Disjuncture, and Positionality in the Workplace 202

Chapter Nine

Conclusions on Learning in the Workplace 204
The Process of Learning in the Workplace Experienced by These Women 204
    Workplace learning is recursive and grows increasingly integrated with other parts of these women's lives throughout their personal development and work history 204
        Workplace learning is recursive 205
        Learning is woven among work and life in ways that are difficult to unravel 205
    What is named "learning" are those experiences that affirm, not rupture and overturn, belief systems integrated with the self's sense of identity and personal capacity 206
    Workplace learning is more closely aligned with a creative process than a problem-solving process 207
        The difficulty of conceptualizing "error" in organizational problem-solving 208
        Learning is thought of as innovating, not mastering 208

The presence of play in the creative process of learning 209
The process of experiential learning in the workplace is meaning making, working with the text of embodied experience 209
The text of workplace experience 210
Questioning theoretical understandings of "experiential learning" 210
Dimensions of a workplace "experience" as it is engaged in a learning process 211
These women reflect on their workplace experience in complex ways 212
Naming
Inventing a language for experience through reflection 213
Critical thinking about the workplace world 213
The problem of reflective self-assessment
Critical second-guessing 213
Reflective dialogue 213
Transformation is confirmed by critical reflection, not instigated by it 214
Workplace Knowledge Most Valued by These Women 215
The women value knowledge of other people 217
The women value knowledge of what they consider to be their authentic self, and ways to integrate this self in the workplace. 218
The women value knowledge of what work purpose and activity towards that purpose is most worthwhile 218
The women value knowledge of how to survive and grow in the workplace 219
The women value knowledge that will grant a sense of competence, position, and personal power in their workplaces 220
Workplace Conditions That Enhance the Women's Learning 222
Incentive and opportunity to make a difference through meaningful work 224
Continuous challenge through newness 224
Projects towards a meaningful end that offer freedom and opportunity to be creative 225
Supportive community where information flows and relationships are carefully tended 226
Opportunities to teach or help others 228
Strong models exemplifying ideals of practice the work-learner aspires to embody 230
Barriers to the Women's Workplace Learning 231
External barriers to learning 233
Work activity that in its very nature stifles what for these women is the essential creative impulse that prompts the will to know. 233
Workplace cultures or structures that somehow block a free flow of interactive communicative inquiry 234
A workplace community where women can find little moral or purposeful "fit" 234
Workplace structures that limit what for these women are necessary freedoms 235
Perceived coercion of any kind, implicit or explicit 235
Internal barriers to learning 236
The barrier of personal energy limits 236
The barrier of anxiety 237
The barrier of feeling alienated from the community 237
The barrier of boredom 238
Summary 238

Chapter Ten
Implications and Suggestions for Further Research 239

Insights about Intention, Disjuncture, and Positionality 239
    Findings of the study 239
    Implications for research and practice 242
Insights about Self and Work 243
    Findings of the study 243
    Implications for research and practice 244
Insights about the Nature of Learning in the Workplace 245
    Findings of the study 245
    Implications for research and practice 246
Insights about Modern Workplaces, Training, and Continuous Learning Ideologies 248
    Findings of the study 248
    Implications for research and practice 249
In Conclusion 250

Bibliography 251

Appendix A
    Consent Form and Letter to Participants 265
Appendix B
    Questions Guiding the Research Conversations 267
Appendix C
    Themes and Categories Yielded in First Analysis 269
Appendix D
    Selected Transcript Samples 271
Appendix E
    Selected Samples of Research Journal 275

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

How do we learn, in the practice of our work, the knowledge that we consider most important to change and grow?

Workplace trainers, organizational change agents, emancipatory adult educators, and people struggling to learn new job skills all eventually must confront the complexity and ultimate undecidability of this question. Especially now, in the late 20th century, those engaged in adult education or training and development who are motivated to help people towards what Coady (1957) called "a full and abundant life" are wrestling with this question. Canadian businesses and industries are struggling to "keep up" and "get ahead" to survive in the hyperactivity of a rapidly expanding global economy, and seem to be sublimating their anxieties and needs into one magic solution: improved workers. Employees receiving this message loud and clear are rushing to act upon it: learn more, learn faster, learn continuously.

Background to the study: Related literature

Donald Schön (1983) pointed out that increasingly a practitioner in the modern workplace must practice within unpredictable environments, ambiguous worklife situations with unclear parameters and uncertain solutions, public suspicion and pressures for accountability, unstable organizational structures, fluctuating definitions, shifting roles and responsibilities, volatile problems, and conflicting values. Workers today continue the struggle to cope with these and other demands. New values and structures in the workplace, such as the variously defined Total Quality movement, are re-inventing public institutions and private enterprise. New management strategies are asking people to accept greater responsibility in the workplace, to be involved in problem-setting, to make decisions, and to cope with change.

At the heart of this contextual flux, people in the workplace must cope with rapid and significant changes in their own tools and technology, the collective understandings of others who share their particular practice, the kinds of problems they are expected to solve, and the nature of their clients -- four fundamentals of most practices in the workplace. Many practitioners are flexible and accomplished learners, practicing with what both Schön (1987) and Brookfield (1987) term "gifted artistry". Cervero (1992) characterizes the goals of professional practice as "wise action", and Jarvis (1992) emphasizes the importance of judgment: embedded in their "know-how" and "know that" is a "know why". Practitioners know a wealth of creative strategies and problem-solving techniques, but also many sorts of knowings which transcend technical skills.

Literature addressing ways of knowing in the workplace characterizes the learning process as "long, circuitous, and far more circumscribed and holistic" (Baskett and Marsick, 1992, p. 12) than conventional wisdom would suppose. Recent research in workplace learning and practitioners' ways of knowing is uncovering some novel analyses of the ways people construct knowledge in and through practice, sometimes with reflection on that practice. New understandings about workplace learning are challenging traditional classroom-type or even electronically delivered training programs. People's "practical" knowledge has been suggested to be separate from their formal knowledge (Lave, 1988; Sternberg and Wagner, 1986). Their knowledge comes not from formal sources but from people in interaction with the problems presented by their environment (Hunt, 1987; Boud and Griffin, 1987). Resources for learning are wide-ranging and often used unconsciously (Baskett, 1983; Marsick and Watkins, 1990). The cycle of workplace learning is long and complex, embracing personal and environmental domains, and including formal pre-professional and inservice continuing education as only one small part of the process (Fox, Maxmanian and Putnam, 1989).

Although conventional continuing education programs still exist based on one-shot presentations in workshops or conferences (the "pay, spray and pray" approach), there is increasing effort to understand and enhance people's learning in actual practice. Context, both of the immediate practical situated activity and of the larger environment shaping and being shaped by the locus of practice, has been recognized as an undertheorized and complex set of phenomena in practice-based learning (Lave, 1993). The worker's interaction with others constituting the knowledge community continues to be studied for its significance in the learning and doing of individuals and groups collectively. Studies of experiential learning have emerged presenting theories of situated cognition (Lave and Wenger, 1991), cognitive apprenticeship (Farmer, Buckmaster, and LeGrand, 1992), action learning (Marsick, 1991), practical intelligence (Sternberg and Wagner, 1984), personal practical knowledge (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991), transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990), a series of models and perspectives naming themselves loosely "the learning organization" (Senge, 1990; Watkins and Marsick, 1993; Dixon, 1993), and a wealth of writing extending Schön's (1983, 1987) theories of critical reflection in and on practice.

Certain fibres in this growing rope of research puzzled me, and raised a series of questions about learning and doing. How do people view themselves, as learners and as workers? What sorts of situations constitute learning experiences, according to these practitioners? What happens to the "learning" from these situations as it is internalized over time?

How do people understand the process itself of "learning" their practice? Do workplace learners view learning as an act of discovering, acquiring and applying someone else's knowledge, or of inventing their own knowledge while doing? Is professional practice essentially a series of problems seeking definition and solution, and professional learning triggered by unfamiliar or irresolvable dilemmas? What questions do workers themselves ask about their ways of knowing and coming-to-know their practice?

How do people make sense of whatever landscape they define as "workplace"? Can learning about workplace practices be considered apart from the totality of people's lives? I wanted to explore the learning biographies that lead people to practice particular kinds of work, and to make particular choices in career direction and learning.

Coming to the question of the study

I come into daily contact with people employed in a wide variety of workplaces and types of work through my teaching/consulting work in adult education. I began to identify certain women among these clients and students who appeared to me to be especially enthusiastic learners. As I found after a few exploratory conversations, they readily described themselves as "continuous learners" and told stories demonstrating their approaches to work as if it were a long unwinding learning journey.

The study I proposed and embarked upon, therefore, was a study of continuous learning in the workplace. Specifically, how do adults learn, change and grow in the workplace? I decided to conduct a series of interviews exploring the work-and-learning histories of women employed in various kinds of work and workplaces. Through an analysis of these personal histories I set out to explore these specific questions:

1. How do these women view themselves as workers and learners?

2. How do these women understand the process of learning and changing their practice?

3. What knowledge do these women value most in their workplace learning? What experiences do they value as creating and changing that learning?

4. What implications do these women's views have for others' understanding of work and workplaces, and for our own continued learning?

Definitions of terms: Meanings of "work" and "learning"

The terms "work", "workplace", "learning" and "continuous learning" are used throughout this study. In chapters describing the data, it will become plain that meanings for these terms are highly idiosyncratic for different participants and implicate central issues of meaning, epistemology, and identity. However, there are some dimensions in the shared usage of these terms by myself and the study participants that deserve preliminary clarification.

"Work and "the workplace"

All of the women in this study, when referring to "work", were referring to those activities in their daily lives that were connected to organizations that coordinated people's efforts towards achieving a concrete purpose. Almost always the work women spoke of was paid labor, although two women included stories of their volunteer work connected to community organizations as part of their learning-in-work histories.

For women who were self-employed, however, the question of what is legitimate work presented a difficult struggle. Some of this struggle revolved around the question of "what is a billable hour." Certain women who worked at home had difficulty justifying breaks for themselves. They wondered about the justifiable amount of time a particular activity should take to legitimate that activity as "work" (with exchange value), and how much of their time spent on that activity is personal research, learning time, or plain slowness that has no exchange value. These women generally referred to all labor they performed in connection with a project or organization outside themselves, including learning and research time, as "work" whether they were paid for it or not.

Somewhat surprisingly, women rarely referred in their histories of work and learning to domestic work related to parenting, sustaining family life, or maintaining a household. Stories of family, especially connected to learning developed through intimate relationships with spouse or children or juggling home life and work life, were frequent. However when the subject of domestic work arose, many women quickly brushed it aside as peripheral to their biography of learning in work.

What is "workplace"

The meaning of "workplace" was similarly difficult to establish. Both the study participants and I found ourselves referring to "the workplace" as some sort of monolithic structure that I recognized to be vaguely associated with the Canadian marketplace. For all the women, the "workplace" was definitely "out there", external to the private inner world or the private domestic sphere of "home place". A "workplace" seemed to be a working community with whose purposes a woman's daily activity was most associated, whether this community was located at a specific geographic site or not.

For the women who went "to work" every day, the workplace was a recognizable spatial-temporal location: a busy inner-city community development agency, a large chemical corporation, a hospital, a suburban bank. The women who associated their work with such "workplaces" appeared to project themselves into a sphere of activity that was fast-paced, multi-tasked, demanding of them instrumental action, practical know-how, communicative decisions and negotiations, intellectual leaps of interpretation and synthesis, creative innovation, and evaluative judgment. However, the characterizing dimensions which caused these women to think of these organizations as their "workplace" were the spheres of activity created by and through the working community, in which each woman had a distinct place of self-in-action. Their daily activity was given worth in that community -- both exchange value in the form of a salary, and contributive value in the form of concrete action validated by the community as serving goals which had been endowed with worth by the collective.

"Learning"

The literature defining and describing what is learning is extensive and has been outlined in detail in Chapter 2, which contains a critical review of this literature. Each woman in this study approached learning from different perspectives. Women also used the term learning differently in different situations. Their stories of learning sometimes did not reflect the orientation that their words implied. For example, one woman talked of her work in training in behavioristic terms, as helping people to "acquire" skills and "absorb" knowledge that they would then "transfer" to the job site. Yet her own stories revealed a deep belief in learning as multiple meanings constructed subjectively by the different learners with whom she worked.

It is important to note that almost all women in this study were familiar with theories of adult learning and development such as those of Knowles (1980), Griffin (1987), Brookfield (1987), Merriam and Caffarella (1990). Most believed that an awareness of learning styles was important, and most were familiar with concepts of critical reflection and informal learning. Some had read articles by Mezirow (1991) and Daloz (1987) about transformative learning and incorporated these ideas into their own beliefs. Most would have described themselves as humanistic in orientation to learning theory.

Significance of the study

This study of women's workplace learning is significant chiefly because there are growing numbers of women in the workplace, and increasing calls for continuous learning in an information-based economy. Training is costly, and the search continues for effective, accountable means of helping employees learn. This study may also be meaningful to workplace educators, researchers in workplace learning, managers/administrators committed to ongoing human development and learning in the workplace, and to women struggling to make meaning and choices in their workplaces.

Significance to workplace educators

For workplace educators this study raises questions from the learners' perspective about what they view as important workplace knowledge, what experiences are learning experiences, and the dilemmas of knowing. The study also examines specific strategies that people find most helpful both to learn and to help others learn in the workplace. These questions and strategies may be helpful for educators wanting to improve their own approaches to developing, facilitating, and evaluating workplace learning programs.

Significance to researchers in workplace learning

This study opens numerous questions about the foundations guiding current theory and practice in workplace learning. Certain assumptions undergirding "learning organization" concepts and the project of creating "continuous learners" in the workplace are challenged by the findings of this study. Existing theories about experiential learning, the nature of self-directed learning and "informal, incidental learning" (Marsick and Watkins, 1990) and the complex processes of women's knowledge construction in work are questioned by this research. The study also addresses the importance of values and politics, of both individual employees and workplace contexts, in the learning process. Finally, the study explores the relationship between a woman's learning in work, her self-development and her sense of identity. All these areas are receiving increasing attention in recent research about workplace learning and knowledge (MacKeracher and McFarland, 1994; Baskett and Marsick, 1992; Watkins and Marsick, 1993; Cervero and Wilson, 1994; Finger and Woolis, 1994).

Significance to managers/administrators

This study has implications for organizing work environments more conducive to learning. Because the research explores the nature of work and workplace conditions that most enhance women's learning, as well as the barriers to learning experienced by women, the study offers practical implications for workplace managers and administrators interested in developing systems and promoting cultures oriented towards continuous workplace learning.

This research also has implications for conventional methods of personnel supervision and performance appraisal in the workplace. The study addresses the nature of women's construction of knowledge, skills, and self, and the relationship between their workplace learning and doing. The congruence of existing practices of assessment with these findings may be called into question.

Significance to women in the workplace

This study examines the everyday lives and meanings of women in the workplace. Other women may find the study's exploration of the complexities of knowing helpful in illuminating some of their own dilemmas in coming to know themselves, change their practice, and name aspects of their working-learning lives that may not be acknowledged in workplace culture or discourse on workplace learning. Women also may find some of the issues raised by this study helpful in distinguishing issues in their own growth and choice-making in the workplace.

Organization of the Thesis

This chapter introduced the background and the major research questions of this study. The next chapter explores the literature about workplace learning. The literature is organized into four categories representing different perspectives, then one category (literature about continuous learning in the workplace and learning organizations) is examined critically. The chapter ends with questions arising from this critical analysis, which helped inform the initial research questions and framed my entry into the data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3 narrates the process of doing the study itself, a story that turned out to be a conversation between the various practical steps of the research methods and my own inner processes to the extent I was able to discern these. Chapter 4 offers the stories of the seventeen women who participated in the study, in the form of a portrait of each woman and her biography of learning through her work history. These stories are presented in no particular order, and do not pretend comprehensiveness or neutrality. They are not intended to link systematically with the following sections, although there are echoes on many levels.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present an analysis of the data on how and why learning in the workplace unfolds. I view the women's learning and work through a tri-focal conceptual lens that emerged from the data while I worked with the themes in the women's stories of learning. The three bands of the lens are intentionality, disjuncture, and positionality. Each chapter presents one of these bands and explains particular sub-themes in each band of intentionality, disjuncture, and positionality as these sub-themes function in the women's workplace learning.

Chapter 8 analyses the data and integrates the themes of the preceding chapters from the perspective of self-development. From this vantage point, much of the women's focus on their workplace learning seems to be a movement towards understanding and expressing in the workplace what many women refer to as their "authentic" selves. This chapter is concerned with how a woman's subjectivity is constituted through her sense of herself as a knower in the workplace.

Chapter 9 views the various concepts, questions, themes and stories emerging in this study from the perspective of the organization. The chapter is organized according to pragmatic questions such as, What is the actual experience of learning for people in the organization? What sorts of work and workplace conditions function as barriers and enhancers to this learning?

The final chapter of the thesis summarizes the study findings about women's meanings of work and learning, and speculates about unanswered questions left at the end of this study about learning organizations and training. Incongruencies, loose ends, and troubling issues about the study itself are raised for further pondering. Implications for further research and practice suggested by the findings of this study are presented.

Chapter 2

Questioning the Literature Related to Workplace Learning

Literature related to workplace learning embraces both "popular" media and scholarly theory and research. Both must be considered, because the boundaries between these two domains are increasingly blurred. Many university-based scholars in this area continue to conduct research through their consulting practices, write for both management magazines and scholarly journals, and deliver "popular" seminars in public and on video that parallel their reports at scholarly conferences. Furthermore there are various areas of study, framed in different ontological and epistemological orientations, that either are currently shaping in significant ways some generally accepted knowledge about workplace learning, or provide helpful starting points for understanding how people learn in the workplace.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents a typology outlining four groups of literature and theoretical approaches related to workplace learning. The typology touches only briefly on individual writers and theories, as much of this literature is addressed in fuller detail at later points throughout the thesis, where the theory illuminates particular aspects of the study data. This overview is also selective rather than exhaustive: my intention is to provide a framework for thinking about workplace learning, not a comprehensive literature review. In the second section, a critical focus is brought to the literature promoting continuous learning in the workplace and learning organizations. The section concludes with questions and issues rising from this critique of the literature, pointing particularly to those concerns which guide this study.

A Typology of Approaches to Workplace Learning

For the purposes of this study, the complex body of literature related to workplace learning has been divided into four main groups of theorists/practitioners/researchers who address notions of workplace learning. These groups are differentiated by purpose: the first group contains people who want to "sculpt" workplaces into more competitive "learning" organizations, the second group wants to deliver better instructional programs to individuals so they will be more valuable workers, the third group deconstructs the assumptions and motives of the first two groups and wants to emancipate workers through alternative conceptions of workplace learning, and the fourth group wants to understand various dimensions of the adult learning process in various contexts, including the workplace.

Group One: Promoting "learning organizations"

The first group is devoted to variations on the general concept of "learning organization" and includes writers such as Senge and his Innovation Associates (1994), Argyris (1993), Dixon (1993), and Watkins and Marsick (1993). This group develops and promotes principles of group learning to help organizations shape themselves into communities of continuous learners. These principles emanate from the values and concepts of the Total Quality movement in business and industry. Senge promotes principles of team learning, systems thinking, personal mastery, understanding mental models, and sharing a vision. Marsick and Watkins promote "action-reflection", teaching organizations to learn through projects with carefully facilitated group critical reflection built into various project stages. Argyris teaches organizations to deconstruct their taken-for-granted ways of working, and enter "double loop learning" where they question why they do what they do and imagine better alternatives. Their message has been popularized, propagated through seminars, CEO addresses and corporate newsletters, and increasingly implemented through human resources department initiatives.

This group comprises writers from business and management backgrounds, as well as adult educators. Their literature tends to be programmatic and prescriptive. It is not usually critically self-reflexive. Although rooted in what Hart (1993) describes as a human capital paradigm, this literature typically positions itself as a change agent. It proclaims a new way for corporate and government organizations through alternatives to hierarchical organizational structuring. This literature also borrows concepts from postmodern theory and linguistics (such as deconstructing the language and ideology underpinning an organization's culture) and new-age spirituality (see for instance Kofman and Senge, 1994, who write about "deep learning", "generative language", recognizing the interconnective energies in and among organizations, and encouraging people to probe their inner selves and develop visions).

An important shared belief among writers in this group is the notion that change is without end, and that therefore learning is a process of continuous adaptation and improvement. A second important belief is that the primary focus should be on group and organizational learning, not individual growth except insofar as this supports the group learning. A major focus is placed on "community", and writers reach into various fields of anthropology, theology and sociology to help advance their prescriptions for a better world. The emphasis and goal, however, are clearly on improving organizational effectiveness and competitiveness in the economy.

Group Two: Providing continuing education for workers

A second group studies and works in the area of continuing education. This group includes people working in the training and development field as well as academics such as Brookfield (1986, 1987), Knowles (1984), Laird (1985), Knox (1986), Cervero (1988), and Guglielmino & Guglielmino (1988). Hundreds of training and development handbooks, curriculum planning and evaluation resources, journals and handbooks providing strategies for teachers and trainers of adults also belong to this group.

Their research focuses on what methods of program design, instructional delivery, and assessment best achieve results evident through accomplished learner performance. They study what and how to better achieve the learners' skill development that the workplace organizations want: the focus is instrumental, the technology one of method. The boundaries are blurred between their study and practice in workplace training and in institutionalized education (college and technical programs) which perhaps explains why their assumptions tend to reflect characteristics of schooling. Education consists of structured, concrete, time-bounded programs or interventions, externally planned and "delivered" by a teacher of some kind. Even the burgeoning literature promoting "self-directed learning" is, as Collins (1990) points out, simply another programming technology manipulated by agents external to the learner.

The types of learning programs and method refinery studied are wide-ranging, including computer-mediated instruction, stand-up training, experiential programs such as management retreats in the wilderness, coaching programs, partnerships such as mentoring (Lovin, 1992), planned programs of critical reflection (Gould, 1991; Deshler, 1991), competency-based instruction, and cognitive apprenticeship (Farmer, Buckmaster, and LeGrand, 1992). Different and sometimes incommensurable epistemologies lie within this group: some operate from the assumption that knowledge is objective and universal, others that individuals construct their own realities, and still others that individuals are shaped by cultural and ideological structures.

Unlike the continuous learning group, some key assumptions underpinning training and development and other continuing education programs are that educational objectives are pre-determined, that learner needs can be assessed, and that an external agent can and should set the curriculum with varying degrees of learner involvement. This literature often does not speak from the learner's perspective, but from the vantage point of the program designer or the instructor who has interests linked to the learner's outcomes. The basic assumptions constituting the status quo of workplace education as schooling are not questioned. Unlike the first group, the focus is on the individual's learning, not the group's. But like the first group, the overall goal is clearly to improve organizational effectiveness through developing the workers' skills and knowledge. And like the first group, the political realities of the workplace as these configure the agendas and processes of learning are not acknowledged.

Group Three: Challenging the workplace learning agendas

A third group, critical of the human capital orientation of the first two groups, examines the power structures of the marketplace and the kinds of learning it values, and laments the distortion of learning into a tool for competitive advantage. This group points out the convenient lack of attention of the first two groups to an important question: whose interests are being served by the interventions, whether of continuous learning in interconnected communities, or of educational programming for individuals? The fear is that adult educators such as those in the first two groups, who used to work for ideals of democracy, citizenship, and liberation (i.e., standing upon the tradition of early 20th-century progressive educators like Corbett and Coady in Canada, or Horton and Lindeman in the USA), seem more and more to be subverting their practice to preserve the market economy and enhance the domination of the elite groups of professionals, technocrats, and management within this system.

The writers of this group are clearly informed by sociological and critical theory rather than by psychological theories of adult learning. Some are sharply critical of any educational project aimed at furthering business interests. Noble (1990), for example, attacks the whole enterprise of human resource development as "retooling" individual workers into compliant and dehumanized servers of "an alien and unforgiving 'information economy'" (p. 132). Others focus on the role of the adult educator in workplace learning, charging educators to take more thoughtful responsibility for developing their practice on clear ethical foundations. Cunningham (1993) claims that all adult education is about politics, and educators must decide their allegiance: to maintain current power relationships or to challenge the present "way of doing business". Finger and Woolis (1994) criticize the motives of continuous learning advocates, charging that these consultants fostering "learning organizations" have confused their role as educators with the agendas of management. Hart (1990) asks why work and especially paid work and high status work has been defined as commodity production, raising penetrating concerns about the role of workplace educators in perpetuating a materialistic attenuated view of life and human potential.

Some writers go beyond deconstruction to offer emancipatory alternatives to the way learning in the workplace has been conceptualized by the continuous organizational learning group and the continuing education group. Most of these alternatives are emancipatory; some are relatively conservative and others are more radical, calling for a complete overhaul of the existing systems structuring work in a capitalist economy. Collins (1990) attacks the reification of normative methodology dominating adult education, and argues for "a renewed sense of vocation and a critically informed pedagogy" (p. xii). Hart (1990), for example, outlines a vision for a new organization of life, family, and labor according to principles she calls "sustenance work", based on a mothering metaphor. Peck (1995) advances an outline for organizational development towards a more energized, ecological, resourceful and democratic world, based on values of giving and loving that he calls "civility". Cervero and Wilson (1993) adopt a pragmatic approach, showing programmers in continuing education how to recognize, make explicit, and balance complex dynamics of power and interests that configure the design and unfolding of learning.

Group Four: Exploring learning processes in the workplace

For purposes of clarity, a fourth group shall be delineated here containing scholars working in multiple areas of adult learning. This group conducts what could be termed "basic" research, informed by theories of adult learning in an attempt to better understand the essence of the learning process. They do not usually restrict their inquiry to particular modes, skills, or contexts such as learning in the workplace, in the classroom, or in leisure. Although their focus is upon understanding how adults learn, some have applied their work in a consulting practice that is interventional, aligned either with group one to foster continuous organizational learning, or with group two to create more effective educational programs for individuals in the workplace. Some have researched the phenomenon of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Boud, 1994). Some continue to develop the rich body of literature exploring self-directed learning in the workplace, begun with Tough's (1971) first research showing that most adult learning develops through what he termed "self-directed projects". Some study the learning process itself, like Jarvis (1992) who probes the existential foundations of what it means to learn and describes various paradoxes of learning in particular social-cultural contexts. Some including Brookfield (1987) and Mezirow (1991) focus on the phenomenon of critical reflection, exploring how and when people examine and challenge their most deeply-held assumptions and beliefs.

Also belonging in this fourth group is the work of Schön (1983, 1987) who studied the learning process that unfolds through a professional working through the messy dilemmas of practice, learning through trial and error, reflection during and after action, and interaction with a coach providing feedback. Schön's work developed into a line of research studying what became called "professionals' ways of knowing". Examples include descriptions of physicians' ways of learning over the course of practice (Fox, Maxmanian, and Putnam, 1989), research on teacher knowledge and change (Elbaz, 1983; Clandinin and Connelly, 1991), and Benner's (1984) work on the growth of expertise among nurses learning in the workplace. These studies show the importance of workplace learning, and the value of attending to the individual's perspective, by listening to his or her stories of change. However, this focus on professionals' ways of knowing excludes huge numbers of people in the workplace who must continuously change and learn to be effective and survive, but who may or may not enjoy the high social prestige, the scholarly formal training, the self-regulation, the restricted membership, or the access to extensive continuing education accorded to professionals. Selman (1988) argues that there is no robust basis for even acknowledging a distinct epistemology called "professional ways of knowing".

Theories about fundamental changes in meaning perspectives, or "transformative learning" (Mezirow, 1991), also belong in this fourth group of writers committed to understanding the learning process. Transformational learning represents a dramatic shift in the deep-rooted understandings, beliefs, and values governing the actions and thinking of people's practice in the workplace. Much of the writing about transformational learning as transcendence (Washburn, 1988), or as a personal journey (Daloz, 1988; Estes, 1992) is deeply psychological in its base. Another body of literature has sprung up in the past decade to explore holistic dimensions of learning. Griffin (1988) argues for the importance of six "strings" that play together on the guitar of an adults' learning: physical, emotional, metaphoric-intuitive, spiritual, rational, and relational. Melamud (1987) explores adult learning through play in work and other areas of life.

Recent inquiry is examining how people in the workplace actually learn their practical, often tacit knowledge through informal means. Polanyi (1966) describes tacit knowledge as "things, . . . important things, that we cannot tell" (p. 22). Marsick and Watkins (1990) present models to explain practitioners' "informal learning" (intentional, sought through learner-selected resources and attention to certain kinds of work experiences), as well as their "incidental learning" (the unintentional but powerful understandings internalized almost unconsciously, about everything from practical know-how to the organization's cultural norms and values). Mott (1994) shows how intuition influences the practice and learning of adult educators, and Boreham (1992) studies physicians' implicit knowing, trying to find ways this can be surfaced through talk to help less experienced physicians improve their diagnoses.

Summary: Implications and issues arising from the literature

From all of this literature we have learned some important things about how people in the workplace change their practice. We know that change in the workplace is a learning process that takes place in individuals' minds and actions, and this process is "long, circuitous, and far more circumscribed and holistic" (Baskett and Marsick, 1992, p. 12) than conventional wisdom would suppose. We recognize that, embedded in an individual's change process, are multiple dimensions of learning embracing context, self (integrating cognition, emotion, spirit, and intuition), style, resources, rhythm, experiences, and ways of responding to those experiences (Griffin, 1987). We know that transitions in people's personal lives, precipitated by social, emotional, spiritual, or psychological upheaval, influence their workplace learning and change (Bridges, 1991). We accept that reflection is a part of changing practice (Schön, 1983), that relationships play a key role in people's learning (Brookfield, 1987), and that the structure and culture of the workplace itself strongly influences how people change and learn (Senge, 1990).

In 1992, Baskett, Marsick, and Cervero saw emerging from theory at that time six polar issues addressing ways knowledge workers learn their practice in the workplace: the individual versus the collective as a site of learning; rational versus intuitive, and cognitive versus emotional modes of learning; routine versus nonroutine situations of learning; formal versus informal education; and constructed versus scientific knowledge. Baskett, Marsick, and Cervero (1992) issued a call for research towards the development of new models of workplace learning that take into account transformative learning, intuitive, affective and relational dimensions of learning, and contextual variables.

It is unfortunate that these issues, while promising for fruitful future inquiry, are still portrayed as binary oppositions, belying a continuing either-or philosophy, an apparent search for a one-best-way approach to workplace learning. But the rich tributaries of research in workplace learning illustrate the recent openness to alternate approaches. Borgmann (1992) claims that our work and questions in this postmodern era reflects "kindred shifts of sympathy":

> . . . .from the belief in a manifest destiny to respect for Native American wisdom, from white Anglo-Saxon Protestant hegemony to ethnic pluralism,

> from male chauvinism to many kinds of feminism, from liberal democratic theory to communitarian reflections, from litigation to mediation, from heroic medical technology to the hospice movement, from industrialism to environmentalism, from hard to soft solutions. (Borgmann, 1992, p. 78)

Although binaries continue to persist in such rhetoric, its motive appears at least superficially laudable. Social engineers of the later 20th century search for ideologies based on community, hope, growth, the personal, the spiritual, and the simple, although the personal is often eclipsed by the social orientation of much adult education literature. This may be one reason why the ideology promoted by the first group of writers, "continuous learning" and the "learning organization" has captured managers' and educators' imaginations so uncritically and galvanized organizational policy so quickly.

A Critical Analysis of "Continuous Learning" Literature

Of all the literature currently available to educators, workers, managers, and human resource professionals actively committed to helping employees learn, the most influential in their practice appears to be models and theories promoting continuous learning in work, or learning organizations, or communities of learners. This literature often expresses itself in euphoric sentiments. Its idealized promises of community building, harmony of understanding, human growth, and cultures of creative excitement border on the utopian.

However, "continuous learning" in recent thinking about workplace learning seems to have been subverted into a fashionable tool for production. The popular educational literature (Senge et al., 1994) extols the notion of continuous learning as a competitive advantage, a tool to produce a flexible, personally accountable staff who can thrive in 'turbulent change' and 'chaos'. An increasing volume of prescriptive literature for the workplace instrumentalizes organizational learning as the proper fulcrum from which to "leverage" the "value-added" outcomes of workers' "continuous learning". Concepts such as "systems thinking", uncovering "mental models", "team learning" (Senge, 1990), "action-reflection" (Watkins and Marsick, 1993), "double loop learning" (Argyris, 1993), "deep learning" and "generative language" (Kofman and Senge, 1995) are promoted by directive pedagogues to enhance workers' predilection to innovate, to self-assess, and to bond with each other in open, sharing, honest, authentic, democratic, ideally communicative relationships. Organizations are reinvented to embrace new visions of themselves as learning communities which encourage people to learn continuously: to be proactive, creative, and critically reflective, to question assumptions and beliefs, frame new problems, take risks, seek resources, learn from their mistakes, and share their knowledge.

Seven points of critique in the continuous learning literature

Despite its alluring vision and euphoric rhetoric, and because of the rapidly spreading appeal of this literature, its premises and assumptions deserve careful critical attention. The following sections examine seven premises of continuous workplace learning and learning organizations. These premises are (1) the organization as the learning site; (2) the role of managers and educators as the producers and consumers of continuous learning literature; (3) understanding the nature of "learners" as largely undifferentiated; (4) valorizing problem-solving and instrumental knowledge; (5) embedding continual learner deficit in the continuous learning ideology; (6) emphasizing learning through reflection, especially critical reflection; and (7) privileging dialogue as the essential medium for group learning in the workplace.

1. The organization as the learning site

Literature promoting learning organizations normally focuses on prescriptions for shaping workplace learning through organizational learning (team work, critical reflection through dialogue, and "systems thinking" as described by Watkins and Marsick, 1994; Senge, 1990; Dixon, 1992). Some more recent literature describes case studies of organizations undertaking initiatives to transform themselves into communities of continuous learners (Catalanello, Dixon, Marsick, O'Neil, and Watkins, 1993); Marsick, Watkins, and O'Neil, 1994). From the organizational focus, learning in the workplace is always spatially and temporally bounded by the organization's contours. Learning becomes defined as competencies that benefit the organization, according to what the organization values. Learning tends to be recognized mostly in knowledge that the organization has access to, knowledge which can be spoken, deconstructed, and shared (i.e., through dialogue), rather than knowledge which remains tacit and embedded in practice, social relationships, visions, intuition, emotional responses, or spiritual divinations. Learning from the organization's perspective is that which can be "fostered", "facilitated" or otherwise schooled by the well-intentioned researcher or educator, rather than that which flows ineffably and naturally on multiple levels while a person breathes. The understanding of "workplace" from the organizational view is confined to itself; the individual's fluid sense of different landscapes of work and work-place is excluded.

Organizational learning literature is usually careful to note that organizations don't learn, people learn (Dixon, 1993). The qualification is that discussion of learning organizations does not deny that we are really talking about understanding and facilitating the way individuals learn, but simultaneously acknowledges how those individual learning outcomes alter the whole inner fabric and outward characteristics of the organizational system. While this is a helpful point of view for positioning the dynamic of individuals' learning within the perspective of the organization's lifeworld -- its purposes, growth trajectory, dilemmas, preoccupations -- it requires careful balance with understandings from the individual's lifeworlds.

In the individual's spheres of activity a single workplace organization is only one (and sometimes a very small) part of the individual's purposes, growth curve, dilemmas and preoccupations. Given the changing nature of work structures in the latter part of the 20th century, organizations must recognize that individual workers often flow among multiple overlapping organizational communities, and move rapidly in and out of different organizations as their employment patterns shift among part-time and full-time, temporary and permanent contracts.

When learning is defined in terms of what perspectives and skills the organization most values, such as shared vision, multi-skills and disclosure of personal assumptions and beliefs, individual diversity is silenced as internal coherence in the organization is privileged. The multitude of changes, meaning-makings, and realizations comprising an individual's daily experience within that organization that are not related to the organization's goals are invisible, unnamed and un-valued when the individual is not the site for understanding. Marsick and Watkins (1990) go so far as to describe as "dysfunctional " that on-going incidental learning that does not advance the organization's purposes.

The organizational perspective is status-quo oriented and self-serving: it can't conceive its own death or life after its death. Workers' learning is to be innovative and critically reflective so long as the outcomes ensure the survival, indeed the prosperity, productivity and competitive advantage of, the employing organization. Learning outcomes that threaten the existence of the organization, such as liberated workers finding ecological and communicatively nurturing ways to achieve their purposes that begin with dismantling the organization, are not possible from the organization's perspective. Meanwhile the focus is placed on changing the individuals to become the kinds of workers corporations demand. From the organization's perspective the "continuously learning" individual is in perpetual deficit, harnessed to Beck's (1995) vision of the "powerful engines" of the economy and struggling to "keep up".

What is missing from the organization's perspective of workplace learning is an appreciation of the circles of individual people's lives and learning as these cross between family, work, household duty, personal relationships, play, and spirituality. We cannot deduce how complex individual learning worlds unfold by imagining what a large collective entity, marked by continuous innovation and "learning", desires. What is needed is more understanding of the individual's meanings of work and learning and the individual's sense of workplaces over time.

2. The role of managers and educators

Literature about continuous learning in organizations is often written by and for those most concerned with the overall health and existence of the organization, those whose own identity is most closely aligned to the organization's goals and success. These are the leaders in the workplace and those educators who serve them, not necessarily individual worker-members of the organization. Matthias and Woolis (1994) point out that literature about continuous learning in the workplace is targeted specifically towards managers, educators, and human resource professionals. Research also tends to focus on the manager-educator perspective (i.e., see Beno, 1994). Two issues attending this circumstance deserve attention.

First, the production and consumption of the learning organization discourse seems to be exclusionary. The individual workers' perspectives and agendas and visions are not pertinent except insofar as these serve the organization. Also, learning organization studies and anecdotal evidence are focused on corporations and institutions' interest in self survival and ability to afford educator-consultants and training programs to design and implement improvements for their workers' learning and development. Small business, and particularly independent contractors, are neglected except by inference. Important to note in this regard is that many writers of learning organization literature have a personal financial stake in constructing an ideology that requires their presence as interventional agents. Marsick and Watkins, Senge's Innovation Associates, Argyris, and Dixon are all consultants listing multi-national corporations among their clients. The initiatives designed by and reported through case study research by these consultants logically reflects the particular needs of the large organization.

Second, the readers and writers of literature promoting continuous learning in the workplace typically approach the learning project as one of "empowering" others, or "helping" others to learn. The voice of the learning organization sculptors tends not to be self-critical. The agenda and vision of the leader or educational agent is bracketed out, obscuring the partiality and positionality of the voices calling for continuous learning and learning organizations. This situation is parallel to the position of the critical pedagogue who wishes to emancipate the "oppressed". Post-critical writers such as Gore (1992) and Ellsworth (1992) have thoroughly critiqued the problem of the non-reflexive educator "doing to" others. Their questions can be posed to learning organization sculptors: Who is controlling the vision, the goals, the definitions of learning -- and for what purposes?

The pragmatic issue here is a certain myopia in assuming that the workers' perspectives can and should be aligned with those of the manager or educator. For example, a primary dimension of Senge's (1990) prescription for a learning organization is "systems thinking". Ideally all workers should, according to Senge, strive to view the "big picture". But why should a broad, global perspective be automatically privileged over one that is more narrow and deep, such as the view of a worker tackling a particular problem? An educators' view (such as Marsick and Watkins) is similarly idiosyncratic. Educators of all people are the most likely to be interested in learning themselves. Educators arguably might be expected to value creativity, continuous learning, to enjoy reflective activity and dialogue, and to be secure enough in their own positions, status, intelligence, identity, and knowledge to willingly and enthusiastically embrace transformational change of assumptions and belief systems.

But can the educators' project be ethically imposed on all workers in the name of ensuring organizational survival (assuming that their untested claims may someday prove accurate, that continuous workers' learning is related to organizational productivity)? This question is not confined to workplace learning, and indeed has been posed compellingly by Usher and Edwards (1994) to challenge the purposes of all education from a postmodernist perspective. Should the manager's interests in the "big picture" become the expected viewpoint for the worker?

What is required is a return to the individual's perspective. What sort of vision and hopes do workers hold for their own futures, and how do these compel and shape workplace learning? Do individual workers share interest in the "bird's eye" systems view? Should they? These questions lead to an overarching issue: what knowledge do workers, and particularly women, value most among their workplace learnings? How do they understand their processes of constructing this knowledge? Do what extent do they perceive themselves as constructors of this knowledge, and what resources do they use? How do women as workers view the role of managers and workplace educators in their journeys of coming-to-know?

3. The nature of "learners"

The literature promoting learning organizations does not satisfactorily differentiate among the meanings of and approaches to learning of individual worker-learners that are being exhorted to participate in dialogic learning communities. Watkins and Marsick (1993) emphasize the importance of helping individuals to understand their own learning style and needs, but predicate their suggestions upon general descriptions about how people learn such as:

> Continuous learning is typically triggered by a problem or challenge on the job . . .to maximize the benefits of much workplace learning, people need to bring what they're learning into conscious awareness. They learn more effectively through a process of questioning, reflection and feedback from others. . . .People can learn at any time by converting ordinary challenges in their work into learning opportunities . . . but there is a deeper level of thinking. Learning is tied to each step of the problem-solving cycle, and it is enhanced by examining more closely the less conscious steps that lie between the conscious steps. (p. 26-27)
>
> Learning may start as a reaction to events, but proactive individuals quickly take charge of their learning. . . .Through action and reflection, people process what they perceive when they learn. . . . Cognitive capacity is greater when a person can conceive of longer term projects (p. 33) . . . Continuous learners ask questions and challenge the beliefs of others." (p. 43)

Many assumptions about learning are reified in such statements. Learning is understood to be essentially problem-solving, "deeper" learning is understood to transpire through processes of critical reflection (especially through verbal disclosure and deconstruction of belief systems), and a self-directed approach to learning is understood to be the ideal towards which employees should be encouraged to strive. These assumptions fail to consider what may be important distinctions among individuals in what holds meaning for them and how they change these meanings, how they value work, how they think of themselves in position to the workplace community, their jobs, and the goals and knowledge of the community, how they think of themselves as knowers, how they function in small groups, how and for what purposes they naturally interact with other people, their core driving intentions in their own lives, their priorities, and their capabilities.

The focus also appears to be placed most on employees who create knowledge, or whose work is knowledge-reliant: "Innovation is at the core of productivity" (Marsick and Watkins, 1993, p. 25). Thus the only individuals to be included in continuous learning initiatives are those whose learning power and stock of learnings are valuable to their employing organization as commodities that can help accelerate the productivity, improve the competitive performativity of the business, and generate profit. Workers that do not generate knowledge, which according to Barlow and Robertson (1994) are increasingly the kinds of employees most hired and required to fill Canada's job openings, are excluded from or outside the borders of the maps being constructed of today's marketplace by the continuous learning promoters. Many writers are currently drawing attention to technology's dehumanizing impact in today's workplaces, diminishing the need for workers who think, create, change, and proactively generate new knowledge (Zuboff, 1988; Swardson, 1992). Continuous learning and growth, evidently, are required most among the technocratic-professional-managerial elite who are the small group in the workplace most likely to be highly educated and have most access to learning opportunities. This group is most likely to value learning as problem-solving, accumulation of formal knowledge, and dialogic critical reflection (since their post-secondary training and practice dilemmas are rooted in these conventional approaches to learning).

Thus the thrust of purpose, the foundation of assumptions, and the target group for continuous learning or learning organization ideology in the workplace neglects huge groups of individual workers, who are implicitly "other" but whose unique lifeworlds and work-learning needs and approaches are rarely recognized by the mainstream literature. Literature about women's knowing is also sparse. There is some research emerging which focuses on the development of the individual woman as learner (Clark, Caffarella, and Ingram, 1994) and working knowledge as perceived by individual women workers (MacKeracher and McFarland, 1994). However, a literature review by Hayes and Smith (1994) reports that studies investigating women's learning processes are still surprisingly rare, and concludes with a call for research efforts to meet this need.

4. Problem-solving and instrumental knowledge

Emphasis in workplace learning is often placed on problem-framing (Schön, 1983, 1987) and problem-solving or "detecting error" (Argyris, 1993). Certainly problem-solving is an important dimension of workplace practice in different levels of employment and nature of work. However, when the understanding of learning becomes driven by a metaphor of problem-solving and product innovation, the learning process is limited to what Habermas (1984) would call "technical" knowledge, for instrumental purposes. Productivity is thus used as the ultimate criterion to evaluate personal growth efforts, build relationships in teams, or develop cultures and close communities. When all meaning-making is subjected to this criterion, what becomes defined as "learning" approaches a narrow means-end conceptualization of life. The usefulness of what is being produced is bracketed out of the question. Learning is unpredictable, emergent process. Its fluidity lies somewhat unhappily with the certainty, bounded time periods, and concreteness of production. Strange fruit can emerge from their union, evident in business literature that discusses "intellectual capital" (Stewart, 1994) as though the ephemerality of meaning-making could be packaged, measured, bought and sold.

Another difficulty with the problem-solving orientation is its frame of learning as continually seeking freedom from difficulty. The notion of question-raising to envision new imaginative possibilities or to deconstruct taken-for-granted presences (which might be termed "problem-making" in the problem-solvers' frame) does not co-exist peacefully with a thrust towards productivity with a goal of eliminating obstacles or problems standing in the way of that productivity.

The main issue with a problem-solving orientation is the narrow picture constructed when one sees the world as a series of problems. As Moore (1994) points out, even in disciplines where the necessity of such an orientation might appear to be obvious, such as medicine, this habit of framing any irregularity or newness in the world as a "problem" to be diagnosed and surgically removed or cured, automatically precludes other, perhaps richer ways of interpreting the unexpected. His example is cholesterol; his question is, why is cholesterol necessarily a problem to be cured by spending research dollars, indulging in anxiety, and reducing lifestyle options?; his response is, we continue to fight rather than gracefully accept our inevitable mortality.

MacKeracher and McFarland (1994) describe five types of "working knowledge" identified by women: (1) technical knowledge or the skills and ideas related to actually producing goods and services in the workplace; (2) social knowledge or how best to relate to co-workers; (3) contextual knowledge or how power and benefits are distributed in their workplace; (4) personal knowledge about self-concept, self-esteem, and self-confidence; and (5) integrated knowledge or the framework within which work is organized and through the nature of work and the workplace is perceived. Only one of these parallels the prominent workplace focus on instrumental knowledge. Further exploration of individuals' meanings of work and the process of learning would help uncover the nature of these knowledges constructed in the workplace by women, their linkages, and the extent to which problem-solving is a process or focus in the creation of these knowledges.

5. Continual learner deficit

The purpose of "continuous learning", indeed the very term, promotes an expansionary view of development. Innovation to keep up with constant change is certainly the focus. When breakthrough thinking and "new" knowledge is privileged by the emphasis on constant innovation, the individual theoretically can never be grounded in a sense of competence or stability. The individual does not have control over pronouncing what counts as knowledge, including personally constructed knowledge. From the continuous learning perspective, the individual is always exhorted (therefore always in deficit) to learn more, learn better, and learn faster. An ideology of "constant improvement" tends to create a competitive track where the racing dogs never reach the quarry. The pressure of "being left behind" is sometimes deliberately used in workplace learning literature (i.e., see Beck, 1994) to generate anxiety and paranoia among employees. Supposedly the resulting pressure and fear provides incentive to learn.

From such a perspective alternate views of learning are invisible. For example, learning might include deepening inward rather than expanding outward; learning might be enriching existing meaning structures, confirming and extending them, rather than adding to them or transforming them; learning might be recursive, circling back to concepts and internalizing them into behaviors and beliefs, rather than generating new concepts.

Hart (1990) offers an elegant critique of the current imperatives driving the workplace and its learning orientation. She raises questions about what is truly important and productive work, and to what extent the expansionary, innovation-oriented perspective fits how individuals view their own learning in the workplace. Hart's vision of "sustenance" work, predicated upon communicative dimensions rather than the hyper-active productivity driving the industrial machine, is only one example illustrating the possible alternatives driven to the margins by the domination of continuous learning initiatives for organizational competitive advantage. The visions of other women reflecting on their meanings of work, and its place in the totality of their lives and positions as members of multiple overlapping communities, holds promise for illuminating other alternatives to the economic imperative driving workplace learning, and colonizing the learner as perpetually "in deficit".

6. Reflection and critical reflection

Watkins and Marsick (1993), like Senge (1994) and Argyris (1993), emphasize reflection, especially dialogic reflection, as a key vehicle for shaping a learning organization. Since Schön's (1983) description of the reflective professional and Revans' (1980) theories about action-reflection projects, much study and practice has promulgated the importance of reflection in learning workplace practice. A key assumption underpinning ideals of reflective practice is that learning occurs when understandings become conscious, either in private mental rumination or in small group talk. The practitioner experiences an unfamiliar or "messy" dilemma and reflects in-action or later, on-action. Mezirow (1991) theorizes that reflection can be directed to review and question the *content* knowledge required (the "what" of the dilemma), the practitioner's problem-solving *process* (the "how to" of the dilemma), or the practitioner's very *premises* for making the decision (the "why"). Reflective learning theories follow the understandings of cognitive schema theory, which depicts learning as a process of building cognitive maps and assimilating new information into them, then tuning or restructuring these schemas (Rumelhart and Norman, 1978). Whereas schema theory suggests that "blocks" of domain knowledge are refined through reflection, other constructionists stress the continuous flux of assumptions through dialectical operations (Benack and Basseches, 1989; Kramer, 1983), showing that contradiction and accepting different worldviews are hallmarks of adult thinking. The bias favoring rational thought underpinning the orientation of dialogic reflection is evident in Bohm's (cited in Senge, 1990) description of the importance of talk to clarify an individual's ambiguous, disordered, contradictory, or "inaccurate" meanings.

This psychologically-based cognitive conception of learning is certainly key to what Mezirow (1991) calls more "integrative, discriminating, permeable, and inclusive" perspectives, but it is surely not the only way of constructing workplace understandings. The most obvious critique of this emphasis on reflection for learning is its untested assumption that understandings must be clarified through conscious rational thought. Cognitive ways of knowing are privileged over other ways of knowing. Thus knowledge that is generated and embodied through sensual, kinesthetic, intuitive, relational, spiritual or emotional meaning systems would not be understood to count as "learning" until it is made explicit and conscious to the rational mind. Strands of research exploring intuition

(Mott, 1995) and the "feeling-sense" developed by practitioners through non-rational learnings (Boreham, 1992) are beginning to refute this dominance of cognitive reflection in workplace learning theory. The question emerging is what other personal capabilities, besides conscious reflection, are engaged in learning workplace practice? How are they involved?

Critics of Schön's (1983, 1987) work on reflective practice such as Selman (1988) and Shulman (1988) have raised other concerns with reflection. First, the emphasis on reflection assumes all individuals can and should find reflection useful or even comfortable, a premise that side-steps broad differences in learning styles. Second, Schön and disciples of reflective practice assume that the individual's reflection can and should be directed and structured through intervention by educational agents, raising issues of control and the sorts of knowledge produced by pedagogical intention. Third, the notion of reflective practice dichotomizes reflection from action, as though kinesthetic, sensual, intuitive, and emotional processes were not embodied and entwined together with the reflective cognitive-interpretive processes, in all apprehension of experience that unfolds in the conscious activities of work.

Inordinate priority in continuous learning literature also seems to be placed on "critical reflection", as though if people could just detect what Argyris (1993) calls their "dysfunctional" taken-for-granted assumptions and deep-seated beliefs, they'd be free to find new and more creative ways to frame the problems of practice and thus improve their performance in the workplace. In demanding explicit critical reflection of its employees, the organization appropriates for its own purposes the most private beliefs and values of the individual's lifeworld -- and configures these to the organization's purposes. A good example are the personal development exercises described in popular learning organization handbooks (i.e. see Senge, 1994), leading individuals through intensely private scrutiny.

Can all people reflect critically? Perry's (1970) work on stages of cognitive development implies that many adults have not yet developed abilities required for critical reflection: distancing from the self, tolerating ambiguity and contradiction, seeing beyond the concrete and the single answer, reasoning abstractly and understanding multiple perspectives. Critical reflection is oriented towards deconstructing and reconstructing past experience and the meanings ascribed to it by the individual -- a movement which is premised on the individual's willingness and ability to reconstruct the experience. What happens to those who cannot or will not?

And what about the goals of critical reflection? Change of the individual is the focus of exercises in critical reflection conducted by the organization. The transformative act of constructing new belief systems is assumed to have greater value than strengthening current beliefs and moral structures, which comprise the individual's identity and meaning webs. Where does this leave an individual who is already feeling alienated in the workworld and destabilized by the organization's lack of return commitment? Meanwhile, the objects for critical focus are carefully delineated to exclude the fundamental structures of capitalism, corporate interests, the economic imperatives, and institutional hegemony. Critical reflection on the operational procedures of these monoliths is theoretically encouraged, but delimited to surface changes. From a radical left perspective (i.e., see Noble, 1990; Cunningham, 1992), employees' minds are expected to remain colonized and loyal to the imperial presence of their employing organization.

The point is not to deny the importance of reflection and critical thinking in the creation of knowledge, but to challenge their unquestioned prominence, and their appropriation by the organization for its own purposes. Also deserving challenge are assumptions, which seem to be rather generic and superficial, about the nature of reflection and self-reflexive activity. Emphasis on cognitive approaches to knowing such as critical reflection have been challenged by many educators in the past decade (i.e. see Griffin, 1988). While the importance of cognition and rationality in learning cannot be denied, the need to explore more carefully other personal dimensions involved in knowing is apparent now that space for considering these alternatives has been opened.

7. Dialogue

The most-promoted vehicle for workplace learning through reflection in learning organization literature is team dialogue (Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 1994; Watkins and Marsick, 1993). Extensive strategies are offered to promote a balance between "inquiry" and "advocacy", to create open, trusting climates where honesty is not punishable and personal disclosure is permissible, where communication is clear and authentic, where people are exposed to multiple perspectives, and where challenges to one another's assumptions are encouraged.

The main assumption of learning through reflective dialogue is that the "ideal speech situation" described by Habermas (1984) is desirable and possible: participants communicate accurate and complete information, they are free from coercion or deception, they are able to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively, they are open to alternate perspectives, and they are able to reflect critically on their own assumptions. Emphasis is placed on achieving "transparency" through talk. One problem with such an assumption is that it ignores the work on socially constructed knowledge in organizations, that shows how people -- including their meanings and messages -- are actually constituted by the intersubjective processes while they contribute to shaping each other within these processes. Simplistic understandings such as those underlying the "team dialogue" prescriptions in learning organization literature, that represent communication as a matter of speaking one's mind clearly and listening closely, fail to appreciate how people are woven together. A second related problem with simplistic understandings of workplace dialogue is that it brackets out the issues and dynamics of relationships as these configure the communication process. Power and rapport are always complex and multi-layered dynamics in group dialogue situations; in the workplace this is especially so when conversations and relationships are structured according to politics of gender, class, age, job status, and other positionalities. Feminist poststructuralists such as Ellsworth (1992) have shown the difficulties of achieving truly democratic "ideal" speech situations when little or no attention is given to what Orner (1992) describes as the multiple social positions, multiple voices, conscious and unconscious pleasures, tensions, desires, and contradictions which are present in all subjects in all historical contexts. The assumption that all people can possibly have equal opportunity to participate, reflect, and refute one another in a "team dialogue" has also been challenged by Brooks (1995) in her studies of workplace teams.

Reflective dialogue privileges talk and words in communication over other means of expression between people, such as kinesthetic, sensual, oral non-verbal, artistic, or intuitive. All complexities of meaning are supposedly reducible to the linear stream of language structures. This is an orientation of management and control that raises questions about agenda as well as the links between all kinds of languages and learnings. Is it true that most valuable workplace learning is produced in the dynamic of interchange? Is it true that giving voice to experience is necessarily a useful process or a necessary part of learning? Feminist post-structuralists such as Orner (1992) and Gore (1992) also ask, where does silence figure in dialogue? What rich possibilities linger in silence as an important dimension of dialogue?

A related problem with reflective dialogue is its disciplinary function. To disclose one's opinions, and particularly to disclose for the purpose of critical scrutiny one's belief systems and values, is to surrender the last private space of personal meaning to the public space of workplace control. The demand for such disclosure could be construed as exercise of surveillance and disciplinary regulation constituting gross violation of an individual's rights.

Current understandings of dialogue and its function in workplace learning, as reflected in learning organization literature, require careful deconstruction. This study provides an opportunity to examine individual women's experiences with dialogue, exploring the value of dialogue to them in their learning, and their perspective on the nature of dialogue.

Questions arising from the critique of continuous learning literature

The seven premises of continuous learning literature chosen for critique here are not comprehensive, but they do provide the foundation for key questions that guide this study exploring women's continuous learning in the workplace. From the initial research questions follow more informed questions:

1. How do women view themselves as workers and learners?

The literature on continuous workplace learning promotes a view of "continuous learners" as innovative, risk-taking, critically reflective about self and environment, creative, resourceful, and collaborative. But what is the perspective of a woman who considers herself a continuous learner in the workplace? What differentiates women in their learning processes, the kinds of knowledge they construct and the ways they change? What subtle distinctions influence just what it means to learn "continuously" in a workplace community for different people?

2. How do women understand the process of learning their practice?

Most recent workplace learning literature supports approaches of reflective practice, critical reflection, collaborative teams inventing knowledge, and dialogue as key mediators of learning. But what workplace experiences most induce what women name as learning? What is it about these experiences that make them learning for these women? What parts of their beings are involved in workplace learning?

The literature suggests that both managers and educators play an important role in facilitating people's workplace learning through directive intervention, mandating continuous learning, designing learning environments, and implementing culture change in the workplace. But what kinds of external interventions and facilitation do individual women say helps them most to learn their work? What shuts down their learning in the workplace? How do they view organizational interventions and initiatives to help them learn?

Organizational learning literature tends to represent workplace learning as situated within the organization's boundaries. But how is continuous learning configured in the individual's lifeworld? How does her learning cross among the boundaries of various aspects of her world? To what extent is workplace learning embedded and situated in the workplace, and to what extent does it integrate with learning in other areas of her life?

3. What do women value most in workplace learning, and experiences that construe and change that knowledge?

The learning organization literature tends to emphasize problem-solving and instrumental knowledge, even viewing intuitive, spiritual, and personal knowledge as ultimately focused towards productivity in the organization's interests. But what kinds of knowledge do women value in their workplace practice? How do they name their workplace knowledge?

The learning organization literature also tends to embed values of expansionary progress, innovation and productivity, and believes that continuous individual change is the key. But what kinds of change do women value and seek in their work? What workplace experiences do they value most as contributing to their learning and growth? What personal strategies, external assistance, and resources do they value most in their workplace learning?

4. What implications do these women's views have for others' understanding of work and workplaces, and for our own continued learning?

This study, seeking to uncover women's perspectives about learning and its process in their work, addresses these questions through findings elaborated throughout the remainder of this document.

Chapter 3

The Process of the Study

Van Manen (1990) explains that in human sciences, research is "the study of meaning: descriptive-interpretive studies of patterns, structures and levels of experiential and/or textual meanings" (p. 181). At the core of this research is meaning: my own and that of the seventeen women who participated in conversations with me over the course of this study. I set out to explore the meanings these women create from their work experiences, through the analytical lens of coming to understand how they learn in the workplace. The mode of inquiry in this study was interpretive and naturalistic: the design evolved, flexible and emergent, throughout the process of the study in a most unpredictable way. As I shall discuss later in this chapter, what began as an intent to find out what specific kinds of experiences, conditions, and strategies facilitate women's learning of the workplace practice, evolved into an exploration of self, soul, searching, and the nature of bonds knitting these energies into the various communities of work that assume prominence at different times over the course of a life.

This study is based on the assumption that people each construct their own knowledge (embracing practical know-how and strategies, values, personal knowledge, and premises for judgment) about their work in and through its practice in a workplace context. These understandings which lead them to think and act in particular ways often shift and change over time. Every person composes for herself what she comes to believe is reality: in the case of this study, a series of workplace realities. She improvises her life within this reality, and names for herself a personal sense of what this so-called worklife means.

The qualitative method that I chose for this naturalistic inquiry was life history. Through one-on-one reflective conversations with each woman, I explored with her the autobiography of her work experience. I expected and found the data to be diverse, non-representational, and situated within the particular, historical, subjectively interpreted context of each woman's reality. Nonetheless after analysing the patterns within each woman's oral history of what I call her career biography, I stepped back and juxtaposed against one another the histories of all seventeen women. In this process of comparative data analysis I evoked some broader commonalities inductively from the data, through an interpretive process analogous to hermeneutical cycles of building understanding. This study presents the broader patterns among all seventeen women's career biographies of learning, while still attempting to preserve the very distinct diversity and rich particularity characterizing the meanings of self, practice, and workplace that each woman has woven for herself.

The participants: Choosing the women

When I first started thinking about how people learn in their workplace practice, and why some people seem to learn and change continuously, thoughtfully and even joyfully in their careers and their approaches to their work, I began paying close attention to the working people that I met in the course of my own practice. At that time I was instructing men and women who were participating part-time in the C.A.C.E. program at the University of Alberta (Certificate for Adult and Continuing Education). These people were all employed full-time in various disciplines and organizations that required them as part of their work to help others to learn. Some were human resource professionals, but a majority sought training in adult education because while they may have been trained in other professional disciplines, they had formally taken on training roles or informally assumed coaching roles in their workplaces. Of these people, a percentage seemed truly fascinated in trying to understand their own and others' learning processes. In fact, these people seemed to have a spark, an intensity, a genuine enthusiasm for learning. They seemed to embrace rather than resist change in their work and their workplaces: they got excited discussing possibilities despite the inevitable constraints of decreased resources and increased uncertainty and demands. As I talked to them more, I found that they honestly became excited by the prospect of helping others to learn. They all believed in the value of self-reflection (a few kept ongoing journals and others enjoyed having a formal excuse to indulge in reflective writing), and they were all comfortable and capable oral articulators of their own mental processes, their feelings, and their experiences.

As I was coming to understand the ideals of continuous learning that dominate the aspirations of many workplace organizations, I thought that I was seeing in these people living examples of what continuously learning practitioners do and how they think. I reasoned that because these people all had a demonstrated commitment to helping others to learn, that they valued learning and growing. And because the process of facilitating others' learning naturally and ineluctably invokes learning in the facilitator, I concluded that their dedication to such a process indicated commitment to their own personal continuous learning.

As I read more about adult learning and workplace experiences I found that there seemed to be a significant gender distinction in learning processes (Belenky, et al., 1986) , employment conditions (constraints, opportunities and expectations) and the nature of work (Hart, 1990), approaches to relationships (Gilligan, 1982) and ways of communicating (Tannen, 1994) in the workplace. The work experience of women has been described as a terrain of particular struggle. Hart (1993) writes about the "immense violence that is committed against the body, against nature, and against those associated with nature (like women). This violence is internally connected with the conventional Western view of progress, technology, and development" (p. 33). Hart argues that women's lifeworlds make their work at any given organization a peripheral part of their total learning. She shows in particular that because most women are mothers, questions concerning what is truly important and productive work, and therefore what is women's learning-in-work, may be conceptualized in very different terms than the profit interests of capital. Lynn and Todoroff (1995) argue that the work lives of Canadian women as these are entwined with family relations have a distinct complexity. Women's work is significant as an area of inquiry, and women's work lives can only be understood "within a framework of fluidity, flexibility, and struggles for freedom" (p. 245). Finally, the majority of people whom I met as participants in my C.A.C.E. courses, these continuous learners with a sparkle of enthusiasm for change and challenge, were also female. For all of these reasons I decided to focus my study on the learning-in-work of women.

I wrote the following descriptors to help guide my choice of women to whom I would extend the invitation of participating in this study:

1. Reflectivity and Time: Participants needed to be willing to engage in a collaborative inquiry process with me into their own learnings and change process. Participants had to be able to reflect thoughtfully on their past and present experiences, and be comfortable sharing these stories and insights.

Participants needed to be able to commit time for at least two intensive interviews plus follow-up conversations to review transcripts and discuss emerging themes.

2. Diverse Disciplines and Types of Practice: The study took a comparative cross-disciplinary approach, that is, practitioners working in a variety of different workplace disciplines were compared. To this end, participants representing diversity in professional practice were sought. Curry and Wengin (1993) have identified three types of practice: "helping" such as ministry, nursing, and teaching; "entrepreneurial" such as business and law; and "technical" such as architecture, systems analysis, and engineering (p.xiii). Other possible groups include "managerial" practices such as recreation directors, office comptrollers, and human resource managers. Some of the dimensions of diversity included:
    - Workplace practices which required pre-service formal study, and those which didn't.
    - Practitioners who worked alone, either independently or in an organization, and those who worked in a group, in small and large organizations.
    - A diverse range of length of service and mastery, from ""novice" to "expert" (Benner, 1984).
    - Practitioners who had moved into middle and upper managerial roles, and those who mostly practiced the work defining the profession.
    - Practitioners who had been exposed to pressure to change through external changes in their workplace, and those who hadn't.

3. Diverse Perspectives: Each practitioner had a unique perspective and approach to her own personal learning and practice. Each participant came to this study with a very different autobiography of experience and knowledge. Therefore each participant probably had a different approach to learning, a different personal worldview, and a different understanding of self and role as a professional. As well, participants each were unique in their cognitive styles and development (Perry, 1970; Belenky et al., 1986), and their personal development (Erikson, 1963; Bridges, 1991). Diversity was also evident in the participants' professional values, understandings, and their ways of doing things. These elements were all partially shaped by the participants' different workplaces, each characterized by a different culture, purpose, leadership, value orientation, power dynamic, and structure.

Working with these criteria, I began by contacting ten women who had participated in C.A.C.E. courses that I had facilitated. Our prior instructor-learner relationship naturally had implications for the relationship that unfolded over the course of the study, implications which I shall explain more fully in the section below entitled "Unfolding relationships". In fact, as I discovered throughout the process of coming to know and befriend each of these women, our relationships were each structured by important dynamics of positionality, language, degree of common experiences, personality and communication styles, self-concept, and orientation to research. The facilitator-learner dynamic was by no means the most significant dynamic affecting the flow of talk, the degree of trust, or the growth of rapport. I decided the most important way to proceed was not to try to eliminate these dynamics of power but to try to understand them, name them, and, with sensitivity to timing and the growth of the relationship with a participant, to explore them with the women in this study.

I realized how naive I still remained after much soul-searching and attempts to democratize the almost inevitable power imbalances between researcher and researched "subjects", when Marilyn one day looked me straight in the eye and said, "And what about Tara? You're always the listener. Let's talk about Tara." I don't know if this was a confrontation or an attempt to establish a more reciprocal, equitable relationship. My response is what surprised me: the immanent disclosure being demanded was not only uncomfortable, but I found myself wondering dogmatically how this switch in the relationship would affect the "research"! Somehow I had been weaving on two separate looms: the knowledge that was gradually shaping itself into this thesis, from dialogues with these women, and my actual relationships with them.

After I began interviewing the women I'd met in my immediate realm of practice, I began meeting others here and there in my workworld and personal life who not only matched the participant criteria I had established for this study, but also expanded the range of occupational experiences and professional training represented in the group of participants. Friends and colleagues who knew of my study suggested names which I also followed up, and I found that others could see what I thought I was seeing: an enthusiasm some people have for learning.

I wondered if my choices were guided too much by my intuition, because truly, I found myself becoming alerted to a potential participant whenever I met a woman who despite the nature of her work or her condition of employment seemed to have a sparkle, a perpetual curiosity, a thirst for learning, and who had managed many changes in her work life. I became concerned that I was being attracted to women with whom I felt most comfortable and with whom rapport unfolded easily, women who perhaps reinforced my own values and reflected the parts of me I liked most back to myself. So I found myself inviting women into the study whose history or realm of experience seemed very different from the others whom I'd come to know, or whose approaches to work and learning added a new dimension, a new perspective in some way.

This is, for example, how I decided to approach Zoe, a woman originally attracted to working in the agonistic world of law who had experienced many changes in thinking and working. This is also why I asked Carla to participate, a woman whose viewpoint, work experiences and corporate training in banking management were very different from anything I and apparently other participants had ever experienced. I also deliberately contacted three women with whom it was not easy for me to talk. Catherine is a woman whose energy I had admired from a professional distance but whose assertiveness and ambition I found frankly intimidating. Elizabeth's critical edge was also somewhat challenging, and Elana's administrative position and government experience at first caused me to shrink in deference and self-consciousness.

This is how the selection of participants unfolded. I eventually came to a point when I found that I had sufficient diversity of experience and perspective with distinct emergence of common recurring themes among the data to draw conclusions about these women's learning in the workplace. At that point I had interviewed seventeen women, and at that point I decided to discontinue the search for more participants.

The participants: Demographics of the women

Seventeen women between the ages of 29 and 55 participated in this study. All are white, able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual women currently living and working in a large urban city in western Canada. Eleven are married, five with children; four are single mothers; two have remained single. For their representation in this document, some women have chosen a pseudonym; others have asked that their real first name be used.

Sixteen of the seventeen women had worked continuously in paid employment in various jobs outside the home since they completed their formal schooling. Two had worked periodically throughout their lives in volunteer as well as paid employment, in between and sometimes overlapping periods at home raising children. All completed high school. Nine had completed undergraduate degrees and one had completed a master's degree. Every one of the women had a history of taking courses continuously either through their employers or more frequently, on their own time and money, in various certificate programs offered through colleges, technical institutes, and university extension departments.

Their occupations were diverse, and all had experienced at least three changes in the type of position and work they have done over the course of their work lives. Their work roles included management, professional, clerical, and technical roles, but the role did not necessarily correlate with the level of formal education they chose to complete. Their careers had grown and evolved and sometimes completely changed, too. Zoe, for example, began her career as a practicing litigation lawyer. She became a college teacher, and now is a university administrator looking for employment in adult education. Nancy began as a hospital-based nurse, then moved into community health care, and now is a community developer and educator. Carla, who now manages a bank in a large urban city, started with this same bank as an ambitious seventeen-year-old in a teller's job in a rural western Canadian small town. At seventeen, Denise began full-time work as a waitress, and has held various positions since then ranging from secretary to trainer to advertising coordinator.

Their current places of work are also diverse, and have changed over their working lives: only two of the women are still working for the same organization in which they began their employment history (both of these are large national corporations, in which the two women have given opportunities to expand their scope of practice considerably). Five of the women are now running their own businesses after experience spent working in larger organizations: three are independent contractors providing services related to human development, community development, and education; one runs an animation film-making studio, and one pulls together other contractors in a variety of projects that she bids on related to organizational development. Seven are working in large organizations (more than 100 employees): four of these women are working in different provincial or federal government departments (health services, forestry and wildlife, economic development and tourism, labor), two in private corporations (chemical services, and a national bank) and one at a university. The other five are working for smaller organizations (fewer than 30 employees): a community women's cooperative, a Catholic social service agency, a rehabilitation health clinic, a computer software company, and an educational/ ministry agency.

I decided that further exploration of these people's working lives might bring stories to light that go beyond facile prescriptions for strategies of how to "make" people change. These stories, I thought, might reveal some of the complex interactions of perception, attitude, experience, and understanding that orient people towards their work so that they find change exciting, and learning opportunities everywhere.

The approach: Discovering the complexity of autobiography as research method

The autobiographical nature of this study is part of what Thomson (1995) describes as a "blossoming international life history movement" (p. 17) in educational research. When I was thinking through the methods for this study I used Dominice's (1991) work as a starting point. Dominice asks people to write out and then orally share their life histories in the light of the education they have received:

> This kind of life history is not an autobiography in which the author is totally free to talk or write about his or her life. Participants have to focus on the process of how they became themselves and how they learned what they know through the various contexts, life stages, and people who were relevant to their education. (Dominice, 1991, p. 197)

In my research, I had women construct their life history in light of their "education" or what they thought of as their "learning" in work experience. Unlike Dominice's method of sharing in small groups, I had women recount their life history to me in conversation. I did not include writing as part of the process, although some of the participants had kept journals as part of their own ongoing reflective practice, which they shared with me.

Narrative was the form that most frequently grounded the autobiographical reflections comprising these conversations I had with the women. McConaghy (1991) draws a careful distinction between two ways of thinking about the function of story narrative in human experience and qualitative research, although she acknowledges the historical ambiguity in the usage of the terms story and narrative. First, story narrative is often used as content or phenomenon for description. Second, narrative can be understood as the active process of ordering experience or the process of making meaning. This second approach is the root of Polkinghorne's (1988) study of the narratives people use to understand their worlds: narrative meaning, said Polkinghorne, is "a cognitive process that organizes human experience into temporally meaningful episodes" (p. 1).

Soon it became apparent that my initial thinking was too facile. What emerged over the course of sometimes hours of talk with a woman was not just her stories of her work, the people she worked with, and the processes that she thought of as "learning", (although her feelings and conceptions emerged through the telling of these stories). The talk of "work" and "work-learning" could not be contained in stories about the jobs a woman had experienced, for most women's sense of work and work "place" is attached to many different contexts and types of activity, including domestic, psychological, intimate interpersonal and spiritual spheres. What emerged through the dialogues of this study was an unfolding of self, in all its complex obsessions and paradoxes, insights and delusions, structures and fluid dynamism.

Autobiography and context

Writers such as Butt et al. (1988) and Pinar (1992) show that through autobiography, a person's sense of self interacting with context becomes more apparent, for the individual watches and listens to the self acting in various contexts over periods of time. As Butt et al. (1988) assert: "it is out of the whole cultural ecological breath of context interacting with the intentionality of living, working and acting that each teachers' unique knowledge is expressed in the present" (p. 102). And finally, autobiography moves past the boundaries of the working environment and the person's "practical" action and knowledge created within it, to inquire of the whole self that is brought to this environment and that moves away from it.

Autobiography recognizes that knowledge of work practice is a dimension of the self's way of expressing and understanding itself. Work practice, whether unfolding in a classroom or other environment, can not be split away for study purposes from other domains of living such as sexuality, spirituality, family relationships, compulsive obsessions, domains through which the self has lived and understood its past experience and visions of its future. Individuals don't compartmentalize their sense of self in this way. A person thinks of herself holistically, and partly in terms of her autobiography. This is another reason why autobiography deserves attention as a method of inquiry that can help us understand how we and others compose and revise meaning through those experiences we consider significant enough to acknowledge.

Pinar (1992) cautions against using autobiography to construct and reify an "unchanging edifice" (p. 218) to represent the self's dynamic complexities, or to perpetuate self commodification by simply mining autobiography as a wealth of data. This had been my original error: I thought I would explore the development of learning not just by describing its occurrence at a particular point in time, but by widening the spectrum to see learning unfold over a whole lifetime. I found that each woman thought not just in terms of her whole life as lived up to this historical moment of its telling, but also about her immanent life. Thus in the imaginative present is encapsulated both past and the future -- one's whole life continuously unfolding.

The lived totality of each participant, her public and private worlds as she perceives the relevance of these to her work, and the situatedness of her subjectivity, is addressed by this study. Diamond (1991), drawing from the ideas of Pinar and Grumet, describes autobiography as "a reconstruction that involves a conscious and reflexive elaboration of much of the author's life, including personal and professional experiences. It provides an interpretation of the episodes of a life and the relation the author has to them . . . Its inner unity is a consequence of the constructive and constitutive activity that is characteristic of personal consciousness" (p. 93). The participants' narratives of their history of learning in workplace practice not only provides the necessary contextual grounding for the study, but also contains the central themes that provide the particular interpretive framework based on each participant's experiences.

Autobiography and the researcher

I found particularly that the study was not just, or perhaps even mainly, about the women. Our dialogues together opened mirrors casting a painful light into my own eyes. I struggled to avoid the mirrors until I realized that this study was about self and subjectivity, which by its situatedness in the relational and particularly by its unfolding in this study's relational circumstance of two women talking, is necessarily intersubjective. Grumet (1992) points out that when researchers inquire into the autobiography of another, "they too become the subject and the object of research. It is never only about the other..." (p. 37). Thus my autobiography was being engaged and opened by my listening to others, my imaginative entry into their lifeworlds. My autobiography both directed what I was capable of hearing and understanding of an other's self, and was open to the rupture of disequilibrium when this other self reached out to engage me through her own perspective. Again, Pinar (1992): "We are not the stories we tell as much as we are the modes of relation to others our stories imply, modes of relation implied by what we delete as much as by what we include" (p. 218). He emphasizes the relational element in autobiography (autobiography is told to, or read by, an other) as the essential engagement that reconnects the private self to the political, public sphere.

Autobiography as an approach to doing research opened avenues of inquiry into the meaning of self and its trajectory of memoried experience, into myself, into context, into the bonds of context attaching each of us involved in this study to her own present and past activity, and linking us to one another through dialogue. More than anything, autobiography opened questions that led my inquiry to penetrate deep layers of my own ontological and epistemological assumptions. I found myself searching the kinds of questions that Grumet (1922) explains will arise in the process of autobiography:

> The researcher who scrutinizes one person's account of experience must confront the very issues that were debated by Husserl and his existential progeny. To what degree does reflection, even when subjected to rigorous discipline, distort experience to fit idealized forms? Does the distancing required by the phenomenological perspective break the bonds of commitment and action that tie us to the real world? Who is the self that we attend? Is the reflecting self continuous with the acting self? Do our multiple social roles splinter the self into situational poses strung along a temporal chain? (Grumet, 1992, p. 40)

The procedure of the research: Unfolding relationships

The data-gathering procedure of the research is best described as a series of developing relationships. Each of the seventeen relationships unfolded very differently, and thus the kinds of stories and feelings I listened to and the way I interpreted these were necessarily somewhat different with each participant.

When I initially contacted the women who shared their work-learning histories for this study, I was feeling uncertain about the specific procedures I would follow during the course of the study. I knew the process would evolve, but I felt I didn't know what sort of information would emerge in the conversations, and I was unsure about how the women would respond to the unstructured nature of the study. I told them I was interested in exploring ways women learn their work practice through their work. Every woman expressed genuine interest in this topic. Most had already indulged in much personal reflection about their own learning processes in the course of their work in helping their colleagues or students to learn, and said they welcomed the opportunity to extend this reflection through talk. I explained that I wanted mostly for them to tell me the history of their life and growth in workplace practice. I hoped that through the unfolding of this autobiography would come stories about changes these women had experienced personally in how they think and act in their work. To my surprise at the time, every woman I asked to participate seemed to know exactly what I was inquiring into in this study -- even though I felt far from secure in being able to articulate this something myself. (See Appendix A for a sample of the letter I gave to participants introducing the study, inviting their participation and asking their consent).

But the relationships, of course, did not begin or end with the first tape-recorded conversations. Nor did the relationships contain themselves to the narrow parameters of tape-recorded talk for the purposes of unraveling the career histories of these women. I had known some of the women before the study began as learners in courses I'd facilitated. One woman enrolled in a course I was instructing after we began the study of her work-learning autobiography. Another I had worked with in an organization years before; we had both gone on to other things in our careers, and this study became an opportunity to renew our acquaintance and a professional collegiality. One participant contracted me to do some work for her organization through talk which spilled out of our conversations about learning and the workplace in the course of this study. Two other women telephoned me periodically to chat about experiences that had occurred recently in their work-learning which had raised an insight for them about their ways of knowing. One has since asked me to act as her mentor as she journeys through the valleys of an undergraduate degree in her mid-life; another has become a close friend with whom I meet socially.

One dilemma I faced was how to gracefully bring to a close some of these relationships without minimizing or exaggerating the bond that developed. It became clear that they had shared their lives in the sort of intimate way one does with a close, trusted other, and that for me to simply go away and write a thesis out of these lives was enacting the worst sort of violation, exploiting women as objects of knowledge. I still have not resolved prickly issues that persist for me: who am I to some of this women? who are they to me?

Research conversations

I began the formal research at a place chosen by each woman with a conversation that was tape-recorded and later transcribed by a secretary understood and protected the confidential nature of the interviews. Some women asked me to meet them at their homes, where often we relaxed in the living room with mugs of coffee outside their working hours. It was not unusual for some of these talks to extend for two or three hours, and once I spent the whole day (by noon, she simply said "I should make us some lunch", and we continued to talk into the late afternoon watching the sun set over the frozen fields on her farm). Some asked to come to my home, where I felt significantly more relaxed and concerned with making them comfortable. Others met me in their offices at work, usually in private spaces where interruptions were minimal. Still, office meetings had a different quality than home meetings. We sat up straighter in workplace chairs and table, the pace was more brisk, I felt more time conscious and tended to keep the conversations shorter by avoiding temptations to probe the multitude of threads that are left hanging out of any particular life story. I was amazed at the concentration of the women in these workplace conversations, who somehow seemed able to focus on personal introspection and bracket out of their consciousness the myriad other workplace demands and issues that my arrival in their offices had interrupted.

Gadamer (1982) explains that what goes on in conversation is the "art of testing" which is the "art of questioning" (p. 330). When we question, we "lay open" or "place in the open" the topic we are discussing. I found that the unstructured conversations often wandered all over, but as much as possible I let the talk follow the women's own associations, naming what they thought to be important. An important role for me to take in the conversations was listening deeply to get at the experience, listening to the feelings, not just the "who-what-wheres" of what happened. Jack (1990) suggests that

> The first step is to ask the meaning of words in order to understand them in the subject's own terms. . . . When one listens, one hears how women use the language of the culture to deny what, on another level, they value and desire. We must learn to help women tell their own stories, and then learn to listen to those stories without being guided by models that restrict our ability to hear. (Anderson, Armitage, Jack, and Wittmer, 1990, p. 106)

I strove as far as possible to maintain the open-ended nature of a non-directive conversation, avoiding lapsing into "interview protocol" casting me as a questioner and the women as informants, merely responding to my questions and thus deferring their lives to my imposed structures of meaning. However the general topics that I asked the women to address, and that I found myself nudging the conversation towards, have been summarized neatly by Butt et al. (1990): "What is the nature of my working reality? How do I think and act in that working context and why? How, through my worklife experience and personal history, did I come to be that way? How do I wish to become in my professional future?" (p. 257).

First conversations

In the first conversations I had with each woman I asked her to tell me about her life history in the work place, and especially her stories of learning that occurred through work experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1991) suggest that narrative plays a very important role in qualitative research "because of its focus on experience and the qualities of life and education" (p. 3). These women, sometimes spontaneously in the course of reflecting back on their lives and sometimes responding to my probes ("can you give me an example?") often narrated stories of "critical incidents", experiences they identified as significant in their own learning process in some way. I had determined that critical incidents were helpful tools for surfacing and analysing experience. Brookfield (1990) defines critical incidents as "brief descriptions. . . . by learners of significant events in their lives", and points to a long tradition of their use in educational research. Newman (1990), working to build learning conversations through story-telling among educators, defines critical incidents as "significant learning moments . . . which have forced me to stand back and examine my beliefs and my [practice] critically" (p. 246). Carter (1993) describes story as an effective research tool for understanding experience and getting at ways of knowing. McConaghy (1991) found that critical incidents narrated orally were an effective means not only for surfacing practitioners' ways of knowing but of constructing new knowledge. Because story is capable of reflecting multiple meanings simultaneously, some expressed and some unexpressed, it can express the knowledge that arises from complex action, while naming and shaping experience that is called to memory through the invocation of telling a listener one's story.

When I was designing the study I listed for myself certain questions to help uncover these critical incidents in women's work lives:

> Tell about a recent time in your work when you felt uncertain but had to act.
> Tell about a recent change that was introduced in your workplace.
> Tell about something you know or can do now that wasn't a part of your practice five years ago. How do you know it? How did you learn it?
> Recall yourself in practice over the past week. What are the most important knowings underlying your behaviors? How are these different from your practice five or ten years ago?
> Tell about a time when you were thrown into a completely unfamiliar situation, or when you had to design a new task to produce a particular outcome.
> Think of a dilemma you faced recently. What did you choose to do? How did you make that choice?
> Tell about the last time you remember consciously learning a new skill or set of skills in practice. (These and other questions I developed prior to the conversations are listed in Appendix B).

In actuality, however, I found it far more important to let each woman tell her own story in her own way. I kept the conversation going, sometimes questioning, sometimes offering my own interpretations of the meanings I thought I was hearing. Often the overall flow of the story meandered between listing events that happened, remembering feelings related to those events, suddenly breaking out to tell a remembered story or describe a significant person, interpreting their own behaviors in these stories or interpreting their own mental processes experienced in reconstructing the story. In some cases, the critical incident was just a flash of feeling or a vivid picture that, in the telling, unfolded a whole glimpse of a particular time of life in a particular context. I found myself stimulating, mediating and probing discussion, to help women "make explicit what often remains implicit", and to act as " a mirror to show them what they are saying and doing, and explore with them possible links between their action and their beliefs about this action" (Marsick, 1990, p. 43).

Reflecting on early conversations

At first I was concerned that my approaches to these conversations were not more structured. What a relief it was to stumble upon writings about feminist research methods mid-way through my study. Feminist researchers suggest that interviewers ask "general questions that allow women to reflect upon their experience and choose for themselves which experiences and feelings are central to their sense of their past" (Anderson, et al., 1990, p. 101). The resulting conversations are "open-ended, dialogic experiences in which the researcher assists the participants to name their reality" (Maguire, 1987). What I had been submitting to intuitively as what felt "right" as the only possible way to engage meaningfully with these women, seemed more legitimate because it had been named and validated by others' approaches.

One difficulty I struggled with in the conversations listening to women's experiences was learning enough of the context quickly to ask the questions that get at the deeper levels of learning. Workplace talk, everyday sharing of stories and feelings, is grounded in a knowledge of the culture and structure of the workplace. Workplace talk is embedded with allusions and a specific lexicon of the organization, as well as language and knowledge specific to the particular disciplinary practice of the woman. These aspects of the women's language and knowledge were often unfamiliar to me, and we both were often hesitant to delay the flow of stories repeatedly for the lengthy explanations that would be necessary for me to fully understand the references. As a result, I found myself having to think quickly to pick up enough of the specific "stuff" grounding their stories to keep the flow of conversation moving, ask questions to probe it further, and make sense of their practice.

In some of the conversations early in the study I felt like an invisible script-writer: shaping, guiding, poking, pointing new paths. I worried that I controlled the other woman's meanings. The text became like a piece of artwork. I was struck by the methods of inquiry so apparent in the transcripts, the way we exchanged and shaped one another's language, the colliding perspectives, the silences, the sudden re-positioning of insight, all framed in careful observing of the social norms required to sustain the rapport of our relationship, validate one another's feelings, defer and mediate when we found difference.

Later I began to surrender much more of myself in the conversations. My presence became a little more prominent in some of the conversations, partly because I believe some of the women and I became much more comfortable with each other. In re-reading these later transcripts I was sometimes uncomfortable with the extent of my participation in the conversations. I probed and questioned, sometimes pounced upon threads that struck me as important. I often communicated in the conversation my own excitement about a developing idea, or expressed sympathy or shared similar experiences. (See Appendix D for selected transcript samples illustrating these points.)

I received various kinds of responses from different women after our conversations. Sometimes they would ask, apparently puzzled, "Is this helpful?" I wondered if some were expecting a more systematic, quantitative approach for a doctoral research project. Many echoed Liz's comments, "This is fun, talking about yourself for a change" -- presumably because so many normally take the role of listener in their own work, or rarely talk about themselves. Several remarked how much they were learning about themselves through our conversations and the reflective processes triggered by our talks. Audrey was excited after our first tape-recorded talk. She sounded eager to meet again when she called me back: "I'm really looking forward to our next talk -- I've been thinking a lot now about my learning here." The second time we met, Persephone showed me the reflective writing that our first talk had stimulated her to put on paper. Many of the women indicated that they found themselves trusting me to a surprisingly high degree, and felt comfortable relating very private information.

Later conversations

I had at least two conversations with participants, and three or four with some. The time lapse between the first and second conversation varied between two and six months. Each time I met participants I brought with me the transcripts of our previous conversations, for purposes of validation. I was somewhat surprised that few of the participants were interested in reading through these. I wondered if these words I was presenting were "dead", old news, as far as their present lives were concerned. The women seemed more interested in creating fresh meanings in the now-moment of conversation, than in checking and confirming what they'd already said. Often significant events in their working conditions had transpired since our first conversation that altered their perspectives significantly. Denise, for example, was exasperated after leaving the job she was so excited about when we first talked. Elana was numb after all the cutbacks and policy changes, which created conflicts and maneuvers that she could only describe as "World War III".

However, participants were patient as I highlighted certain of their work experiences or ideas they had mentioned or patterns that I thought I saw developing, and they confirmed or disconfirmed the significance of these experiences, ideas, and patterns. Sometimes it became clear that an idea or story in our first conversation that had created a certain momentum sweeping us both into its excitement was actually receiving false emphasis. Fran's first descriptions about learning holistic therapeutic touch had caught my imagination and prompted my questioning, and perhaps she was more interested that day in thinking about it. The topic occupied a lengthy portion of our talk which later proved to be a false indicator of its significance. Later when I referred to therapeutic touch she seemed surprised that I was weaving it into her work-learning history as playing any importance: "That was only a passing interest -- it was no big deal." She also made it clear that she didn't want to be represented solely through her long-ago stories of learning nursing. She didn't identify herself as nurse now, and those tales were just not important except perhaps as background to understand what she really wanted to talk about and make sense of -- what she was learning right now about feminism and her self.

Usually however, participants concurred with what they'd already said, or added details to flesh out a story or clarify an idea. Sometimes these details were very important, helping me to understand that what I thought was a priority really wasn't from their perspective. Sometimes they would spontaneously narrate a story again, and together we would examine how the construction of this story had shifted. What shifted most in the conversations, I believe, were the subtle structures of meaning shaping in my own imagination.

Using critical incident technique

I began by asking participants to describe a critical incident that related to their workplace learning. Narrating critical incident stories allowed the participants to work through a learning experience in language; they represent in textual form their first construction of that experience as knowledge. In later conversations when I returned to participants to invite them to reflect on some of these critical incidents. I found them useful points from which to encourage our distancing from the immediacy of the women's remembered experience. This is the epoche, which Edmund Husserl (1964) insists in his phenomenological work is necessary to distance ourselves from our experience in order to come closer to it, the epoche that Merleau Ponty (1962) rescues from idealizing to situate it back in the world of objects and material context, claiming that the epoche can "slacken the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus bring them to our notice" (p. xiii).

Embedded in the story of a critical incident are the underpinning beliefs and assumptions governing how each narrator makes meaning and acts in ways determined by her meaning structures. Brookfield (1990) claims that critical incidents are valuable for probing people's assumptions first because they represent learners' existential worlds and assumptions in the learners' own expression, and second because they are specific, and therefore less threatening and ultimately more fruitful than asking learners direct general questions about their assumptions. Newman found that questions helped to focus analysis of teachers' critical incident stories : "Why did I remember this incident? What makes it significant? What do I learn from it? What is one question it raises about my [practice]?" (Newman, 1990, p. 247)

The conversations did not often probe participants' assumptions and beliefs related to their practice as revealed through these stories. Nonetheless, I believe the research conversations actually shaped the ways some of these women made sense of their learning and their construction of self through the process of autobiography of work experience. Sometimes women shared with me themes that they'd already uncovered in their life reflections, claimed ownership for and woven into their identities. An example is Elana's sense of her career pattern being a series of jobs in "boxes" that she had pushed out of shape until the box couldn't tolerate more stretching, then she leapt to a new box; this image had evidently impressed itself so strongly into her consciousness that she actually perceived and shaped new employment situations to fit the pattern. Persephone, too, had already worked out what she believed was an important life-theme in her work-learning experience: "I always thought there was something wrong with me, leaving jobs, until I realized -- I am a questor. And that's okay."

Other times it was apparent that the life-themes that emerged in the talk were being uttered into existence spontaneously. I found the same phenomenon reported by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) in their study asking women to recount their experiences of learning: that women sometimes experienced a perceptual shift in the process of reflecting on their past experiences. Women reported new insights about the inadequacy of their previous frameworks for interpreting the incident, and the recognition of shifts toward new structures that helped them resolve incongruities or account for subsequent understandings.

The process of narrating confusing or contradictory incidents from their worklife pasts, that have never been articulated and thus exposed to the logic of linguistic syntax, sometimes put these women in the position of confronting and changing their own interpretations of their experience during its narration. Clandinin and Connelly (1991) term this process "restorying". Westkott (1990) explains that in the process of verbal narration "women's actions are being reinterpreted and profoundly illuminated from the perspective of women's consciousness" (p. 65).

This didn't usually happen in my study until at least a second conversation with participants, and even then it only occurred with certain individuals. Marilyn, for example, usually listened carefully to my questions and would stop to reflect on the "why's" of her own behavior as she heard herself reconstruct it at the spontaneous point of utterance. One night we were sitting at her kitchen table drinking tea; the supper dishes, long cold, were still lying around us. We'd talked for about two hours. Earlier she had excitedly told me of her most recent project which involved leading focus groups to find out the kinds of services they wanted from a huge new recreational venue proposed for the city. What a wonderful project it had been: hard work and long hours, a whirlwind of activity in which she felt competent, valuable, creative. And, she said, a peak learning experience. Interesting, I thought. Sounds more like she's using what she's already learned. So I asked: "What did you learn?" She struggled a minute, then --

> Well, I realized how far I've come since last year, how much more I value process than the product. But also -- I'm learning what I can do to improve as a facilitator. For instance, I made a mistake in one group. There was this man who just couldn't or wouldn't cooperate -- making rude comments, or questioning what we were doing or sidetracking. I just couldn't get him to participate in the right spirit. . . .

As Marilyn spoke, she seemed to suddenly remember learnings she'd shared earlier that evening, about the need to let go of responsibility for other's actions. She had "storied" this incident to herself as a situation she didn't handle well because she lacked whatever technique would have worked to draw the man into the group's purpose. However, in the context of critical reflection the incident suddenly reframed itself, appearing to her as an example of her continuing attempts to look after other people's problems. She looked at me smiling wryly: "I never thought of it that way before...Hmmm. Isn't that interesting." This is the perceptual shift that Kathleen Taylor (1995) shows is a significant outcome of self-assessment talk. I believe, however, that for such a shift to occur and be shared, context is critical. Marilyn had spent about four evenings with me by that point and said she trusted me completely. The setting was warm, cosy and relaxed, we had eaten together and were enjoying each other's company -- the context was conducive to intimate sorts of revelation. I suspect she felt comfortable enough critiquing her own "blind spot" with me because she knew she had secured my respect and caring. Marilyn also values critical reflection, helps others interrupt their own taken-for-grantedness to examine their assumptions, and tries to be alert to opportunities to do this herself.

But I also experienced perceptual shifts frequently -- which I was uncomfortable sharing with participants because I thought, this talk is supposed to be about them. This motive of deference in fact reinforced my power in the conversations. I did not often disclose the messiness of my thought processes as I was encouraging the women to do, nor was I describing *my* experiences along with the present limitations of my understanding of these experiences for *their* private interpretation and critique. Only later during data analysis did I recognize the necessity of surfacing and examining the layers of shift that my own meaning perspectives had undergone over the course of a year in talking with the women and thinking about their words. In the conversations, I continually took the role of listener. I felt disoriented when Marilyn asked me, "So what about Tara?" I found it extremely hard to unmuffle my tongue and begin talking. But perhaps Marilyn and others who asked me questions about my life and my opinions were interested in understanding more about how I was listening to them, rather than establishing a more symmetrical platform of disclosure.

Ensuring data trustworthiness

In planning this study, I looked carefully at ways developed by other qualitative researchers to think about and use "criteria" to ensure a high standard of quality. Schubert and Ayers (1992) describe many potential problems inherent in conducting research through listening to, interpreting, and participating in people's life stories of their practice. They list questions related to reliability and validity, the relationship of researcher to the researched, analytical problems, personal bias and beliefs, maintaining "good faith" in a collaborative enterprise, and subjective responsibility. "The fundamental problem common to this work," they say, "is an interpretive (and not a scholarly) one: how to simultaneously convey a sense of individual life and collective design, how to move between local detail and universal structure, how to grasp both personal integrity and social dimension, how to balance being both within the research project and outside of it" (p. 157).

Clandinin and Connelly (1991) suggest "transferability", as well as "adequacy" and "plausibility", as possible criteria for evaluating a "good narrative" to replace validity, reliability, and generalization. These had relevance for my study. Even though I was using an interpretive approach rather than narrative inquiry as described by Clandinin and Connelly, part of my task was to surface and tell participants' stories of their changing practice in the workplace. In organizing, selecting, arranging, and revising to construct these representations, I attended to considerations like representing each woman's story as believable and realistic, as well as ensuring authenticity.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) propose methods for achieving such criteria that I used in this study: triangulation, member checks, and maintaining an audit trail. This trail consisted of the transcription of conversations with each participant, my own research journal in which I recorded field-note observations and interpretations of conversations as well as my own emotional, biographical and intuitive responses in the process, and the extensive notes I kept recording the process of data analysis. I also attempted to be faithful to recommendations from Glesne and Peshkin (1992), who summarize several ways by which the qualitative researcher can ensure "trustworthiness": investing large amounts of time, remaining continually alert to subjective bias, seeking the assistance of others, and recognizing the study limitations.

An important issue for me related to credibility is the question of just what are the data. Some qualitative researchers seem to approach participant experiences as subjectively biased reports of "the truth", that participant reports are at best limited accounts of experience. Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) state "there are many reasons to be cautious of taking respondents' accounts wholly at face value" (p. 107), including participants' lack of full awareness, and participant motives to allocate blame or distort truth claims for personal interest. This position begs the question "whose truth?" as in, whose reality is the focus of the inquiry? In my view, the point of qualitative research is to understand the perspectives of people. The most difficult task for me was finding a way to truly enter this perspective, which meant learning to let go of my own tendency to judge another's depiction of their experience as being narrow-minded or too selective or self-serving or otherwise inadequate. One of my tasks as data-gatherer in this research was to listen as deeply as possible to try to understand how another person views, construes, and reviews a particular experience. As Eisner (1991) says, "it is a matter of being able to handle several ways of seeing as a series of differing views rather than reducing all views to a single correct one" (Eisner, 1991, p. 49).

Attention to dependability was important, especially given the recursive nature of my approach to data analysis and my reliance on intuitive knowledge. I established an audit trail so that another might see how and why I made the judgments that I did in this study. I tracked the reflective conversations with participants as much as possible throughout the data analysis, relying not only upon careful examination of verbatim transcripts to evoke themes but also upon detailed note-taking during our conversations and clear, detailed descriptions, observations, and interpretations recorded in journal-writing throughout the data gathering process.

I found the research journal invaluable during data analysis for alerting me to my own assumptions and limitations of understanding in the various stages of developing relationships with participants. (See Appendix E for selected samples of my research journal). One part of this journal consisted of conversation summaries: after each meeting with a participant, I sat at the lap-top computer and poured out as narrative everything I remembered in what Owens (1982) has termed, using the work of Geertz, "thick description": "synthesizing, integrating and relating observations in such a way as to 'take the reader there'" (p.15). This description recorded what I could remember of the rich flow of non-verbal communication in the conversation, as well as those issues and patterns that seemed to me to leap forth as being critical themes in the life history or learning of a particular woman. When I returned to these summaries later in the process, I could hear in them my own interpretive voice, and stand apart from it. This was a jarring experience, and served to suddenly alert me to the tacit meanings present in my current relationships to the material, alternately moving among comprehension and dissonance. I wrote about these meanings, many half-shaped and emotional or pre-conscious in nature.

A key issue in trustworthiness of qualitative research is credibility, or whether or not the inferences inductively drawn from the data are valid, that is, to what extent the participants acknowledge the researcher's interpretations of their experiences to authentically reflect their sense of reality. I shared evolving meanings with participants throughout the study, inviting the women to review and discuss these, to compare my representations and interpretations with their own perceptions. I followed up my own questions and hunches in further conversations with some participants. I also found myself testing the unfolding meanings for fit with other findings and related theoretical constructs in published work. Confirmability is the extent to which my interpretations of the data would be acknowledged as authentic by someone else viewing the data. Participants each read and confirmed the authenticity of the final written version of their individual stories as these appear in this document.

Transferability is providing data in ways others can use to decide if it transfers for them. Contextual detail, stories of each woman's work history, and many citations from transcripts woven through the transcript analyses have been presented in this document to enable readers to determine transferability. But although I sought patterns in an attempt to construct theory about continuous learning in the workplace, I still attempted to be faithful to the individual uniqueness of each participant's experiences and learning processes, emphasizing these as being culturally, historically, and personally situated within a particular context. In other words, I aspired to follow what Eisner describes as an artistic approach to the research. Artistic approaches rely on the researcher's creativity, subjectivity, and unique insights, and "try to locate the general in the particular. They attempt to shed light on what is unique in time and space while at the same time conveying insights that exceed the limits of the situation in which they emerge" (Eisner, 1981, p. 7).

Data analysis

The process of data analysis unwound in a circular, recursive manner throughout the period in which I was arranging conversations with the research participants. After the last formal conversation was tape-recorded and transcribed, in my journal I continued the analysis of the transcripts, and reflective discourse with my own analysis. I began formal data analysis using some of the strategies described by Glaser (1978). In particular, I pursued "open categorizing, memoing, moving toward parsimony through the determination of a core category, recycling of earlier steps in terms of the core category, sorting of memos, and the write-up of the theory" (p. 68). I developed a list of categories and themes from the data (see Appendix C).

Three categories in particular were derived from the data as clearly being prominently intertwined in the moment of engagement that constitutes learning: intention, disjuncture, and positionality. These categories were robust, but I was still left with a sense of having fragmented the totality of the women's learning through the analytical process. While important, the three categories somehow didn't completely capture what I felt to be significant currents in the holistic meanings emerging from the conversations, related to women's constitution of self, their idiosyncratic patterns of learning, their multiple subject positions, and the interplay of their experiences with their contexts as they understood their situatedness. I sought to re-examine the data focusing on the sense of self which I had identified in my early journal writing.

So setting aside this approach, I went back to my research journal and read it through, then read through each of the transcripts in a sweep. I used a critical reader-response method (Probst, 1988) similar to my approach to literary criticism, alert for the dance of meanings on the peripheries of the literal or rational vision. Throughout this process I continued reading in and journal writing about scholarly and imaginative literature about learning, work, self, and meaning. I found myself weaving new holistic understandings very naturalistically in a hermeneutical cycle. The purpose of my data analysis had changed, become more aligned with hermeneutical inquiry as Jardine (1992) explains it:

> [The goal is] to educe understanding, to bring forth the presuppositions in which we already live. Its task, therefore, is not to methodically achieve a relationship to some matter and to secure understanding in such a method. Rather, its task is to recollect the contours and textures of the life we are already living, a life that is not secured by the methods we can wield to render such a life our object. (Jardine, 1992, p. 116)

I began to write out interpretive commentary, sometimes taking different perspectives on the same phenomenon, sometimes approaching a particular story or theme from a different focus. I frequently returned to the transcripts, my journal, and other reflective notes, rethinking my interpretation. Throughout this phase of data analysis, meanings continued to unfold and percolate in the writing process. I listened to hunches, using an intuitive process to develop understanding grounded in the data. I learned how to live with ambiguity while writing, deferring my desire for certainty and "having it all figured out," while accepting the need to keep fluid and allow big shifts in my emerging understandings of these women's learning experiences. As one participant said, a person must learn to let go of early ideas during growth, "to kill the babies," painful as it might be. She was talking about her process of film-making, but I found a similar creative process unfolding in data analysis.

I found that although I worked with each woman's meanings of work history independently, certain ideas began to resonate across some of the histories. These ideas were stronger in some stories and less apparent or not evident at all in other transcripts. It was actually during the process of writing that I was finally able to name what had been eluding me for months, and which became for me a central hanger giving shape to the filmy gauze of what previously had been disconnected scarves of ideas and images and stories: this central meaning structure was my conviction that many women's focus for learning and doing in the workplace was their construction of self, as will be shown later in this document. Certain strong threads of self, such as "seeking", began to emerge as links among women's choices in work and learning.

I found myself stepping more prominently into the story, recalling the argument of Hampsten (1989) who urges women researchers to use their own authority to help bring other voices into the public conversation, and to comment on what they've learned. She believes women researchers need to worry less about working from their own ideas, and take more initiative in analysing other women's stories from a variety of perspectives. Guba (1981) asked, "how can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are a function solely of the inquiry and not of the biases, motivation, interest, perspective, and so on of the inquirer?" (Guba, 1981, p. 80). I realized that this study was as much concerned with the biases, motivation, interest, and perspective of the inquirer, as with the meanings of the participants, and the intersubjectivity between us.

The researcher's relationship with the researched

The possibility of remaining detached, objective, value-free and "neutral" in research has been challenged by many qualitative researchers (Nielsen, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1983). The researcher's sense of self and her experiences, what Duelli Klein (1983) refers to as her "conscious subjectivity" -- assumptions, beliefs, values, experiences, cannot be "bracketed out" as positivistic perspectives would believe. Instead, the researcher's subjectivity fundamentally shapes through thousands of choices the questions to herself and others, the interpretation of the responses, and the conceptualization and representation of the whole.

As McConaghy (1991) points out, the word "role" is troublesome for it implies a character pretending to be someone other than herself. In the actual act of conversing, one is alternately or simultaneously theatricalizing and immersed in meaning-making, caught in the world of narratives being spun. Both speaker and listener struggle to make meaning presumably out of the experience being narrated by the participant, sometimes through talk, sometimes through solitary reflection on the conversation and connections we each make with our own other experiences. Both speaker and listener each come to presence through language. She lives in multiple selves in the conversation, some shared and others held private: a self emerging through intersubjectivity in the breath of the conversational present; various "roles" of self adopted in this present such as teacher of the researcher, expert reporter, seeker, critic; past selves that are evoked in stories; past and present reflecting selves; visions of future selves. The "role" of researcher is also not single but various, and seems to emerge mainly in the degree of responsibility I take for recording and interpreting the text of the conversation (s). Clandinin and Connelly (1991) refer to the "multiple I's" or multiple selves that live in the researcher: "The 'I' can speak as researcher, teacher, man or woman, commentator, research participant, narrative critic and as a theory builder. Yet in living the narrative inquiry process we are one person" (p. 9). I would add that all of these roles named by Clandinin and Connelly are in fact multiple and sometimes contradictory, and exist at various points of emotional, intellectual and psychological distance to the other in the unwinding conversation and to the data. Most important, the researcher's role/s cannot easily be disentangled from the research relationship. A complex dynamic composes the relationship which I believe is comparable to the pedagogical relationship of teacher and student, the student being the researcher.

The stance of researcher in any relationship to the "researched" is immediately troublesome because the researcher stance postures itself as describing the world when in fact it is inherently of the order of world-making. I was acutely aware that my research focus -- learning through workplace practice -- caused participants to think about their experiences in a particular way, selecting from and valuing these experiences, and structuring these experiences into a particular story of their autobiography. This story may not otherwise have intruded into the consciousness of participants. I believe that each research conversation has the potential to change a person, and some of the conversations of this study evidently did effect significant change, both for participants and for me. Any research question like mine, exploring personal change and meaning structures, is especially powerful in this potential. I felt intrusive and at times voyeuristic. When participants confided, as many did, that they found themselves relating to me private understandings, self-doubts, and experience that they would normally feel uncomfortable revealing because for some reason they felt a high degree of trust with me. I wondered about the ethical considerations of such blurring of boundaries in the relationship. My conversation with the data was dialectical, helping me to become more critically aware of my own assumptions that tether me within my hermeneutical frame, while this unfolding self-knowledge awakened my sensitivity to new ways of interpreting the women's life histories.

The hazard of listening to another's stories and then presuming to represent these is the issue of whose voice is speaking in the research. Who speaks when these women "speak for themselves"? The format of research conversation itself may create conditions that force women to manufacture a voice that is inauthentic or imitative. Reinharz (1992) asks "what kind of voice and whose voice is present in a published oral history -- is it the voice of oppression, the voice of imitation, the authentic unsilenced self, or multiple voices?" (p. 139). Through the dialectic of intersubjectivity that unfolds in the process of the interviews, the researcher is shaped:

> Women studying women reveals the complex way in which women as objects of knowledge reflect back upon women as subjects of knowledge. Knowledge of the other and knowledge of the self are mutually informing, because self and other share a common condition of being women . . .This intersubjectivity does not mean the identity of subject and object, but rather their dialectical relationship. Thus the questions that the investigator asks of the object of knowledge grows out of her own concerns and experiences. (Westkott, 1990, p. 61-62)

An important part of the story of this study is my own story of learning and change as researcher in the inquiry. Reinharz (1992) explains that the strategy of starting from one's own experience "defines the research questions, leads to sources of useful data, gains the trust of others in doing the research, and enables us to partially test our findings" (p. 259). This strategy tends to merge the public and the private, as the researcher struggles to understand her self through her research project. This was very much the case in my own research of women's learning through their work experience. One of the reasons that I have included a personal account not only of those happenings in my own biography that led me into and through this exploration of other women's learning-in-work, but also of my own experiences as I proceeded through the research process, is because I believe these fundamentally helped to shape the relationships I developed with women participating in this study, my responses to their stories and feelings, and the interpretive window through which I was able to perceive their experiences. Including my own experience is, I believe, a necessity in this research, and a source of legitimacy.

The authorship of the researcher begs questions that Geertz (1986) explains with compelling lucidity. How is the story shaped and flavored and coloured by the very language I chose to represent it? How does my own understanding of coherence, of audience, of what is worth telling as narrative and poetry, of what details constitute powerful images, change the reality I am representing? And what significance do such issues pose for data analysis, trustworthiness, authenticity, and ethical responsibility?

The purpose of my role as researcher in the relationships comprising this study is the most important consideration for me. As a researcher, I view myself primarily as a learner. I am a questioner. My purpose is to uncover, to see, to hear, to seek. A humble learner honors and respects the source of learning. An astute learner realizes that knowledge exists not in this source, but is constructed in her own head. The relationships that unfolded in this study were, I maintain, pedagogical in nature. The participants' stories, rendered as faithfully and authentically as possible, are presented here alongside my own story of learning which unfolds throughout the interpretation of data.

Ethical considerations

Formal ethical approval was obtained from the Department's Ethical Review Committee prior to beginning data collection. Fully informed and voluntary written consent to participate in tape-recorded transcribed conversations for the purposes of this study was secured from the women who participated. I explained the time and reflective commitment involved in this study before obtaining consent. Participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time, although no one exercised this option.

Throughout the conversations participants were involved in discussion about how to represent their experiences. After various stages of data analysis I questioned each participant about particular interpretations I was making from their transcripts. I also checked back with them as to what particular information, stories, and personal themes were the most pertinent to their workplace learning, in their view. Some were specific about particular information that was not to be used in data analysis or appear in the final document. Participants were offered the opportunity to review transcripts from the conversations, and I frequently validated with them the emerging themes and questions from the data analysis.

All data was considered highly sensitive and treated with utmost confidentiality. Some participants chose to be represented by their real first names; others appear under pseudonyms. Each participant personally validated the written story representing their work-life and learning as it appears in this document.

Chapter 4

Life-Stories of Women and Their Learning in the Workplace

This chapter presents a series of stories, one for each of the seventeen women who participated in this study. Each story presents a portrait of a woman, including a capsule history of her work biography as she explained it to me. These explanations emerging in the research conversations were not seamless and linear. Rather, the biographies tumbled forth in a patchwork of unchronological critical incidents, some chronological narrative, questions, associations, feelings, re-visiting and re-storying particular incidents.

The point is simply a reminder that the biographies here are by no means transparent renderings of women's work lives, despite all efforts to reproduce trustworthy and credible accounts. I have tried to broaden the biographical accounts to include a sense of my relationship with each woman, and I have also foregrounded myself clearly as the interpretive constructor of these written summaries of lives of learning in the workplace, to make explicit for the reader as much as possible my own assumptions and idiosyncrasies of judgment in constructing these stories. Finally, the biographies reflect women's work histories as revealed through the lens of how she learned, when she changed, and what knowings she developed and valued most over the course of her work history. Each woman has personally approved the story as it appears here.

These are extraordinary, fascinating people engaged in what most of them would likely consider to be ordinary work. The portraits that follow are presented to honor these seventeen women whose life examples have much to teach researchers about continuous learning in the workplace.

Denise: Learning structures, goals, and stubborn determination

When I first visited Denise's apartment-condominium, I was struck by the inordinate tidiness and order, to a degree unusual even for a single person who can count on an article remaining exactly where she last placed it. As an adult she had always lived by herself. She bought and decorated this condominium herself, in fashionable rose-and-grey furnishings. Plentiful pictures and assorted brick-a-brack were carefully arranged on walls and in corners. As she ushered me in, she excused herself to turn off her computer, where she had been updating her data base and spreadsheet files for planning her June wedding. Denise explained that she plans everything in detail. "I look at the goal and list what needs to happen by when, then work backwards and write down what I have to do at each step of the way. I learned that at QC." She showed me her daytimer, where she has written down all the things she needs to do tomorrow, including putting her sister's birthday card in the mail. "See, there's nothing written down that I have to do tomorrow night. That means I have the night off. I can do whatever I want." Work tasks, phone calls to be made, even the date for doing laundry -- everything is tacked down, planned, penciled neatly into the daytimer. "That way I can sit back and relax. I don't have to stress myself out trying to remember things, or worry about things getting done."

I was surprised by the attention to detailed order and closure and "getting things done," for the woman I had met attending a seminar for adult educators had seemed easy-going. Gregarious, outspoken and high-spirited, Denise had entered and even led small group discussion enthusiastically, volunteering stories and opinions with evidently none of the self-consciousness typical of participants meeting for the first time. She seemed process-oriented, not task-oriented, enjoying the class opportunities of conversation with people for the sake of talking through ideas. At the seminar coffee break I found out that Denise enjoyed achievement: she loved country dancing, and competed around the country.

Denise had progressed to various positions of increasing responsibility in training and development in the company where she worked, Quest Chemical (QC).She loved her work: she appeared to thrive on the company's restructuring, the changes wrought by the new team programs, and the creative and interpersonal challenges of helping people learn to adapt to work in teams with new technology. When I met her she was just beginning a new job with a small computer software company. She indicated she was enjoying very much the change and the challenges of learning a whole new set of skills demanded by this job, despite having to balance it with the course demands of the adult education certificate program in which she was enrolled. I was intrigued with this 34-year-old woman's energy and apparently boundless enthusiasm for change, so I asked if she would talk to me about her life story in the workplace.

I was profoundly surprised to find out that Denise is Francophone. Surprised because I'd never heard her speak French, or speak with any accent, or refer to the Francophone community in all the examples she'd narrated in class from her personal experience. She moved to Alberta from Quebec with her father when she was seventeen. Although she could speak no English, she found a job waitressing in a coffee shop, and she has worked continuously in different jobs ever since. She remembered these months working, looking after her father and waiting for her mother and sisters to afford to join the family in Edmonton, as lonely but not frightening. She said frequently during our conversation, "I'm stubborn" or "I'm a fighter" when narrating a tale of persistence or effort. Her work history pattern was characterized by personal goals. She saw clearly what she wanted to make a reality at some future time, and was then driven by this goal to expend huge amounts of energy if necessary. This was typically her pattern in learning a new skill, tackling a new project, obtaining a certificate, or landing a new job.

Denise's process of learning English was a startling example of her goal-directedness and persistent "fighting" characteristics. Always gregarious and pleasant, she had sought to make new friends with the people she met at the coffee shop despite her halting understanding of English. One young man seemed especially fond of her: he sought her out when he came in for coffee, calling her "beaver" and laughing with his friends. She would laugh too, enjoying being included with the group, and looked forward to his visits. Then one day another waitress took Denise aside and explained the dirty reference. Denise remembered feeling shattered, degraded. But her immediate reaction was not to withdraw into herself in defeat, nor to lash outwardly in rage and vows of revenge. Her only vow was that she would learn English as quickly as possible. She embarked on a self-styled self-study program, because English classes were beyond her financial means. She spoke English only, carrying a dictionary with her and asking friends she trusted to correct her. She listened to everything spoken around her and immediately tried to imitate it. At nights she studied at home using an instructional book she'd bought. She practiced single words over and over to eliminate her accent. "I said, nobody, nobody will know I speak French." And she said she didn't speak French again for years.

This same persistence and goal-directedness was evident in the stories Denise told from her learning at QC. This company appeared to have made a profound impression on Denise. She frequently cites examples of an "awesome training manager" or other role model she learned much from. She peppered conversation about skills with references from her learnings at the QC workplace: information ("The telephone system of 800 numbers, I learned that from QC") or techniques ("When you have to confront someone you sit down and you talk it out, you listen to their side then you make your case. My supervisor used to do that") or examples ("I learned at QC, in a team you've gotta help the group come to a consensus you can live with. If they all want orange uniforms and you happen to hate orange, you make your case but you walk out of there and you support whatever the group decides"). Even her current life skills she credits to what she was taught at QC. "QC developed me into a planner: here's the result you want, now go backwards. Chart it and plan. Set little goals and deadlines. Measure everything you do so you know if you're winning or losing. It works for me. I follow the pattern without much change."

Why had the QC company made such on impression on Denise, I wanted to know. What experiences there had been the most important influences on her learning? How had she learned these skills and attitudes? Denise began work with QC in the accounting department but said it was in the training department where she became alive and developed so much. In training she helped QC articulate its new Total Quality Management policy top-down to employees and introduce them to the skills of continuous learning and teamwork.

She was able to enumerate three factors that she believed were most significant in enhancing her own growth. First, the work itself combined the immediate observable results and feedback of teaching people specific skills, with the creative process and exciting scope of understanding the company's vision and finding ways to train people so it becomes real. Denise was partly motivated, I believe, because she felt personal responsibility for the company's plan: she could visualize it clearly and her own daily goals were to bring this vision into existence -- a form of world-making. She was not stranded alone to do this, she was part of a strong team herself that were implementing this enormous project using a clear plan of action. Second, Denise saw visible signs around the company that convinced her the company's vision and philosophy were integrated with all aspects of the business. Company policies, marketing approaches, priorities, resource allocation, managers' behaviors, and ways of dealing with crisis all supported continuous learning, risk-taking, innovation, and the special importance of individual people.

Third, Denise worked directly under a supervisor whom she admired. This supervisor treated Denise with respect, involved Denise in the high profile projects and decisions, and actively coached Denise, sitting beside her to work through something together. The supervisor also demonstrated her independence in the company: Denise watched her "stand up" to management to defend the needs and goals of the training department, obtaining resources for the department by making an effective case to upper management. Denise couldn't remember any behavior or incident or skill in particular that she learned from this supervisor. Instead, she seemed to have absorbed deeply a detailed picture of this supervisor's manner. When later confronted by a dilemma in the workplace, especially a tricky or unpleasant interpersonal issue requiring delicacy, Denise would recall the living model of her supervisor. She would picture how this supervisor would act, what she would say, even where she would arrange the conversation to take place. In an upsetting confrontation with a boss in a later job, Denise was able to conjure the presence of her mental role model like a genie from a lamp. She found herself behaving with calm assurance, drawing strength and security in her own "rightness" by stepping in the tracks of the behavior patterns her memoried supervisor would have followed. Her story of this conversation unfolded in short, clipped sentences of confident certainty. She presented herself as assertive and clear about her own needs, specifying her boundaries, showing the other the common objective and attempting to be reasonable in reaching a compromise: "I tell him no, I can't do all this. I can't continue working these hours. Let's look at what work needs to be done.... The office needs some organization. I can help with that if he'd like me to. We lack expertise in certain areas. ...I challenged him on every one of his accusations."

The issues that fascinated me in Denise's stories of learning at QC were the importance of relationships, and of learning not by being told but by being shown by people she respected for both their effectiveness and for their apparent genuine commitment to ideals. The "showing" happened not in deliberate demonstration artificially divorced from the flow of context, but in the hurly-burly of real situations, alive with visual, tactile, intuitive, auditory and olfactory cues. These cues, perceived and remembered holistically by the conscious alert mind, are not easily articulated by the rational mind lumbering along in its slower patterns of logic and language. Denise cared to become like these people and to work with them to make their goal come alive. She learned the actual skills of teaching and the content to be taught through daily trial-and-error: experimenting with a technique, watching the consequences carefully, adjusting the technique, and watching others try different teaching methods. It seemed to me that once she was clear about what was important to learn and personally motivated to learn it, the actual learning process unfolded naturally and quickly. She became so attuned to everything around her, because she wanted to absorb it all, that she enfolded into her behaviors many things that she couldn't recall: they became habitual, tacit.

Sadly, staff shuffles landed Denise back in the accounting department where she coped with the unbearable feeling of going backwards: "reduced" to repetitive work, unable to "use" her new skills and insights, and deprived of the vital atmosphere of constant learning that she had come to depend upon like oxygen. Yet despite the final desperate days of unhappiness ("I felt a total sense of no control, caved in , dehydrated, wilting away -- I also knew I was getting too self-absorbed in my job") and the betrayal by a company to whom she had given her loyalty, Denise never let go the interpersonal and task-planning behaviors she had developed, and the insights and values she had learned at QC. Even more surprising, Denise seemed to have internalized the QC way as a benchmark, a framework for understanding "how things should be" in the workplace. As is evident in the story below, Denise interpreted and measured and responded to the events at a different workplace using the QC model.

In her new job at the computer software company, Denise was hired as a translator for computer manuals. In her customary pattern of working energetically and seeking perfection -- giving 150% to "prove herself" -- curious to everything and devouring the learning opportunities like a hungry child in a bakery, she was exhilarated and fulfilled, not exhausted. "Give me more, I want to learn more" was her description of her feelings at the time. Such employees often attract the attention of managers and are given the projects that provide the greatest opportunities to develop skills. In small businesses (this one had fewer than ten employees at any time including clerical "temps") the fluctuating demands and limited human resources require people who can shift flexibly from one role to another to cover all the functions that a larger company can afford to entrust to specialists or departments.

Within a few weeks, Denise was asked to take on the project of designing and executing the advertising campaign for a new income tax calculation package being finalized by the company. Denise wasn't frightened by the enormity of accepting such a huge responsibility despite the fact she said she knew nothing about computers and software and income tax, and in advertising had absolutely no training, experience, resources, or even contacts. But, "I'm stubborn, I'm a fighter." She may have had no post-secondary training of any kind, but she had learned through work experience at QC that she was capable of succeeding at planning and completing new projects, and she had learned specific strategies to use whatever she needed to figure things out. She also had learned well at QC that any project can be broken into specific, concrete, visualizable goals, and each goal can be mapped out on paper to create what looks like a simple step-wise series of actions to take. In other words, despite the challenge, Denise had developed the intrapersonal attitudes and instrumental skills that allowed her to feel in control of the advertising project from the start.

She tackled the project of learning all about marketing and advertising exactly as she would have tackled a new program at GE. She first found and contacted resource people, winnowing out the most helpful and knowledgeable. Unabashedly, trustingly, and humbly, without hindrance of personal needs to create a status or preserve ego, she asked all the questions she could think of to get started ("I'm green -- Talk to me like I'm a child" she asked people). With her characteristic penchant for tidy order, she charted the answers. She made a vocabulary glossary, then mapped the tasks and their steps as she discovered what had to be done and shaped the goals. Systematically she proceeded through the action steps, figuring out where to go next by asking people. A personal goal driving her through this, I discovered, was beginning to emerge as she explored the fascinating world of advertising: 'I want to learn how to design an advertising campaign so I can do this in another company' was as important as 'I want to figure out how to sell this product successfully'. In other words, as Denise proceeded through the learning process to accomplish the various tasks comprising the project, she was aware of her desire to somehow record and remember the knowledge later, not just allow it to be absorbed into past action.

This reminds me of the distinction Louise Rosenblatt makes between "esthetic" reading, where the reader allows herself to lose the present and be transported into the world of the book, not caring whether she remembers any of it to bring back when she surfaces back in the actual world, and "efferent" reading, where the reader is consciously focused on mining the text for information to be recalled and used later at a future date, not necessarily caring whether the reading experience is enjoyable. Denise's approach to working on the advertising campaign was both esthetic -- losing herself in the exciting moment-to-moment world of doing the project, and efferent -- deliberately filing away schemes of meaning and information details of explicit knowledge for future use.) From her description, she seemed to be gloriously happy learning and working in this project: she was largely autonomous, and had both the creative potential and the "big picture" scope that made the project both "important" and fun. But the exigencies of small business intervened. Denise said the workload increased to inhuman levels as tax time approached. Overtime hours stretched tempers and patience. Anxious owners began berating the staff when problems emerged with the product. Profit worries cut the resources: no overtime hours were to be paid. Denise knew from her QC experience what sorts of conditions and management behaviors were "how things should be." When she compared this company to QC, she was able to judge the presence of problems with certainty.

When I last spoke with Denise, she had left the software company after repeated "serious" conversations with management about the conditions:

> I go and talk to Wayne at lunch. And I tell him, no, I can't do all this. I can't continue working all these hours. I need help. The office needs

> organization. I can help him with that if he'd like me to. He said, well don't worry so much about the quality. But I'm somewhat of a perfectionist . . . He somehow managed to turn the conversation where he made it sound like this was my problem. And we sat there for an hour and half and no matter how much I denied what he said and argued with him, it always came around to him wanting to peg it as my personality issue. I said, Wayne, no. Get it out of your head. Tom (her manager) and I get along great. We're both pigheaded, and that's fine. We've laughed about that. If I have something on my mind I'll tell Tom. If he has something he'll tell me. We're okay. So get that off your mind. Just focus on the issue. We lack staff. We lack training. We lack expertise.

After a few days adjusting to the shock of being alone and unemployed in a recession with no post-secondary training and a mortgage to pay, I found her busily structuring her days learning how to career search -- a new project that had stimulated her excitement. Her job hunt was, naturally, mapped out on the computer complete with timelines and tasks. So many resumes had to be delivered each day, so many contacts phoned. She was also running back and forth to a local drug store to fax in some translation work for an "emergency" contract that had landed in her lap -- "I'll do anything to prove I'm capable." Her long-term goals were equally clear and systematic. As she emphasized repeatedly, "I like to be in control." And as she had demonstrated throughout her work career, with careful planning and the systematic use of strategies she had developed and found effective, and most of all by committing the boundless resources of her own energy and enthusiasm for tackling new things, she could learn anything once her interest has been caught.

Wendy: Learning to go it alone, after thriving in a workplace community

After she packs her two sons off to school, Wendy sits down to her kitchen table, or sits cross-legged among the papers spread out on her living room rug, to outline a workshop she is preparing for her most recent contract. When I met her, most of her work when I met her was preparing and delivering workshops in career searching, but she also did short research projects, needs assessments, file reviews, course development and manual writing for various agencies in the Edmonton area. She liked the independence and flexibility, being her "own boss", the opportunity to say "no" to tasks she doesn't want to do or a contract that falls in August when she wants to holiday with her family.

When I first met Wendy, a participant in a class I was teaching in Adult Learning and Development, I was attracted by her air of assured capability combined with an enthusiastic and seemingly tireless curiosity in all the people and resources around her. She had an easy way of engaging people in conversation to learn from them. She brought resources to class to share with others including a magical story called "The Alchemist". She seemed intent on connecting as much of the class theory as possible directly to her work as a private consultant in a practical manner. She listened intently to others' stories and asked many questions about learning from her own experience as a teacher. When the class was over, I kept Wendy's number as someone to call if I ever needed to refer a contract to someone else.

I met her again a year later in the university library: she was carrying an enormous stack of books. "This is just like a detective search!" she beamed. Her current contract was a literature search, something she'd never done before. But she was happily figuring it out as she went along, asking for help from librarians and other resource people. I found out later that this is Wendy's primary mode of learning something new. First, she said "yes" to a project that someone offers her. (Rarely does she seek out projects, actively "marketing" herself or bidding on a Request For Proposal). Second, she told me she says "Hmmm", maybe feeling a few butterflies about just how she's going to do this, then chooses a starting place from something she knows. She might call a friend who's "in the know" for suggestions, or recall a process she's used in the past, or retrieve a book that's been helpful before. Third, she embarks on a process she dubs "learning by the seat of your pants." Many of us are familiar with this feeling; a few, like Wendy, are completely comfortable with it. She said, "I can learn anything." She also talked perceptively about what she terms "the learning attitude: instead of just saying, well that'll never work, say how could that work? If you're thinking about what you're doing, you're always learning something."

I was curious to know how Wendy developed her remarkable enthusiasm, attentiveness to life, and the self-directed strategies that made her a continuous learner. As Wendy served me coffee and muffins in her living room, she told me about life as an independent contractor in the workplace. She focused a great deal on the frustrations and uncertainties of working apart from an organization surrounded by other people. One of her concerns is a common question among independent contractors: "what should I charge?" The surface question was answered easily with a little research to find out the "going rates" charged by competitor consultants. But the deeper underlying question is more difficult: "how do I judge my own work?" Wendy said,

> There's no one to review your work as a contractor. You do the work and nobody knows or cares really whether you did it or not, or how well you did it, or how much time it took. You're second-guessing yourself and feel your performance is mediocre. What I always do is charge far too little. . . .I find that this program writing is so time-consuming. And I don't know if I'm slow or whatever, but I don't want people to be paying me for something that takes far more time than I need...I don't know, when I'm preparing a workshop, if I should be reading more, one more book or whatever.

A related concern then, is "how long should things take?" and "how much should I do?" . Choices of what tasks are worth doing are easier in an organization: one's work is mostly directed by the dictates of others or the job description, and the choices of what really is worth doing, how should it be done, and how long should it take are narrowly circumscribed within the cultural models surrounding the worker. But for Wendy working on her own, it was sometimes hard to know what constituted a meaningful and worthwhile use of one working hour or day. Wendy said, "I was telling my husband the other day, I went in there and reviewed files for four hours. I came out of there and my eye was totally bloodshot. Because in four hours I never took a break. In one way [working as a contractor] is freedom but in another way I have to do so much."

Finally, Wendy asked me tentatively about motivation ("How do you motivate yourself to do all the things you do?" she asked me, catching me completely off guard for I was feeling at the time somewhat distressed about my own lack of motivation) -- something she said was conflicting her. Especially now that her priorities have shifted to her family, the reason for doing some of the projects she contracts, her essential motives, are missing. She and her family don't spend much money and her husband's salary sustains them, so her own work is really just something to do in her free time. And Wendy loves to read. Yet, she said, "Work is important to me. It structures my time. It makes me feel useful. But paid employment had more prestige." When she didn't care much about the money, work was sometimes hard to justify doing, especially when she was all by herself, not caught in the momentum of an organization.

But when she worked, and when left to her own judgment of "what activity constituted meaningful and legitimate work and use time," she set for herself a near-impossible horizon of expectation. Wendy called it "my perfectionist streak," and it runs her ragged. Independent contractors don't usually have daily contact with a particular organizational culture that can be their reference point, a culture providing not only motivation but also ready yardsticks and models against which to judge use of time and way of working, and compare standards of work. For Wendy, the absence of this organizational reference point seemed to leave a vacuum in her working life. She explained that she sometimes found herself spinning around trying to convince herself that her own benchmarks for assessing herself were sufficient. "Bottom line, I don't believe in anything I develop. If I get an idea I look for fifteen references to back it up."

Like Denise, Wendy devoted a rather lengthy period of her life (twelve years) working in an organization she respected and enjoyed before she embarked on a solo career. Staff development opportunities were plentiful at the counseling agency. Her colleagues were fun to work with. The job tasks themselves (counseling chemically dependent people) were personally fulfilling and endlessly varied. Wendy referred frequently to the "groupiness" and close relationships among staff, lots of "good-natured kidding: crazy people, you know?" The group was "together all the time," and from Wendy's description, respected each other: "they're a good bunch, really capable people, really interesting people, lots of interests and activities outside work." The memory of this work environment contrasted sharply with Wendy's tale of a meeting with a recent client. Her contract was to design, deliver, and report on a survey of staff attitudes at the university. She was asked to come to the staff meeting, where she knew nobody, and where nobody really knew or talked to her. She was introduced briefly -- "This is Wendy. She's doing the survey for us." During the contract she came and went, worked in the office space they cleared for her, and said hello to the people who politely greeted her. But she felt an emptiness, possibly a longing to belong and an acute sense of missing the community feeling she had enjoyed at the counseling agency. When the survey was completed she was paid -- and that was it. No one really commented on her work.

Wendy's first job as a young social worker was one she remembered with a shudder: "horrible, horrible". She had responsibility for a large case load of difficult clients, and the work involved visiting clients in their homes and writing reports. The critical incident she remembered vividly was driving out "to the boonies" of rural Alberta to visit a man reportedly abusing his children. Wendy recalled the scene through the employment conditions of social work that she had since learned to expect as standard: she wondered what she was doing out there "all by myself!," tired from working long hours, confronting a potentially violent man on his home turf. She said she was amazed now to believe that she actually did all the things she was asked to do, without blinking -- and without being assaulted.

The addictions counseling agency she later joined, by contrast, provided extensive on-the-job training for every skill she needed to learn. She was shown exactly what to do to counsel individuals, and then how to facilitate groups, and was able to practice her new skills every day in her own work. It was this on-going interaction with people, her clients, that taught her the most. Wendy found she liked the work helping people overcome addiction, and she was good at it -- because she could see results. "I learned that I'm a really compassionate person, and that I can understand people." She believed her focus of learning was "how to be a really a good listener, how to hear what people mean when they're talking, the things that are important, and the things [to say or ask] that really help people make changes, get better." She was also surrounded by colleagues who knew what to do and who liked to talk and listen to each others' problems. The whole environment was apparently not only supportive but seemed to me from Wendy's tales to have radiated an air of security: a sort of "we know what we are doing, and we do things right" feeling. She said one of the most important things she learned in the workplace was to respect her colleagues -- even though as a young, "more narrow-minded" newcomer her first tendency had been to discount the "old-timers" as not knowing much of relevance to her. Over the years of learning to listen she'd discovered that she had also learned how much of value people have to say to her. She loved new ideas more than anything else, and she found she always walked away from encounters with other people with new ideas.

A simple explanation for Wendy's current insecurity in setting her own timelines and judging her own quality of work is that when cut loose from a strong, assertive organizational culture and a close-knit staff in which she was intertwined, she felt somewhat adrift. Recently she worked on a project with another woman and was delighted to recover some of the old sense of security in her work. The woman's work style was convergent, nicely balancing Wendy's divergent way of continually generating new alternatives. After the first few minutes of brainstorming ideas for the workshop they were to present, Wendy was amazed at the woman's ability to simply pick four items and say, these will do fine. Wendy herself suspected they would be fine, but left by herself she believed she would have spent the remainder of the day creating other alternatives in case there was something better. Meanwhile the woman frequently praised Wendy's creativity, which surprised her: she didn't know her teaching ideas were anything special. Working with another helped Wendy crystallize and confirm ideas. Overall, she was delighted with the collaboration and hopes to make more opportunities to do so. Other contractors might have balked at splitting the fee for a single workshop, which doesn't change just because there are two presenters. For Wendy, however, was far more important the grounding yielded by the partnership, the sense of personal validation.

Throughout Wendy's career tales, her movement appeared to be from working independently, to learning how to function interdependently, and finally to finding a way of working alone without the energy and support of being intertwined in a warm, tight organizational web, propelled by a strong organizational direction and purpose. The negative experiences she related caused anxiety and a general shut-down of learning. Her learning seemed to be expedited not through failures and errors, but by successes and support, and confirmation of her ideas. She learned, in an organization where "work" meant helping people in need, and where people focused on learning how to help people better while having fun, to regard work and the workplace as a wonderfully rich palette of colourful people to learn from.

Nancy: Learning to be a maverick and ask the tough questions

From the first time I met her I was struck by Nancy's apparent serene assurance. Tall and slender, with a single long brown braid, Nancy was intensely attentive in class. She spoke infrequently in plenary discussions, periodically offering an opinion of flashing insight or asking a question that penetrated to the core of the issue. In her group research project for the class, Nancy opted to work with a shy but passionate Iranian woman, a cooperative venture requiring much empathic understanding and patience. Nancy not only uncovered this woman's rich professional experience (something I had failed to do as the instructor of this woman in two different classes) but adapted the group report to meet this woman's needs rather than the expectations of the class. Nancy had spent most of her nursing career in community work, traveling with her husband to various North American cities. At the time of our acquaintance she was coordinating a community agency extending education and development to low-income women and their children. When I asked Nancy to participate in the study, I intended to find out how she had developed her intuitive understanding of people, her ability to adapt to widely varying health care environments for her practice, and most of all her startling self-reflexive perceptions about her practice.

She described herself as a voracious reader, devouring new ideas and information, taking courses in everything from drawing to community development. "I like to try a lot of things, see if there's a fit for me." Nancy had opted for the university-degree route to obtain her nursing qualifications, and many of her stories about learning center on the traumas of learning the technical skills of nursing. Sadly, she found the atmosphere among the students to be fiercely competitive. She felt a general sense of ignorance and fear ("you couldn't ask questions, you didn't talk because you didn't know what you didn't know, you were just scared") was promoted by the instructors. Courses seemed fragmented and of questionable relevance. Although Nancy saw the links later ("oh to be a mature student, when you can make all the connections!"), she didn't at the time.

Unlike the hospital-trained nurses, people like herself who studied at the university had learned procedures through "book learning...but it's another to actually do it. The first time I gave an intravenous I was terrified. The incident is crystal clear in my mind because I was so scared. I was going to do it for the first time on this patient. The people in the hospital would say, 'Didn't they teach you anything over there?'" Nancy remembers her first months in practice as a nurse as "hell", and blames the university for "setting us up to be inadequate." She said it was then she truly understood that to learn the skills she needed to be competent and feel the control she wanted to feel in her workplace, she had to be in charge of the process herself: "it was up to me to find out what I needed to know and find out how to learn it." Things change fast in medicine, like the technology she had to learn to operate, the accepted procedures and the healthcare philosophies governing her practice. Nancy found herself constantly watching and adapting to keep growing in competence. If a new fetal monitor came in there wasn't time and money to train people to use it; she had to figure it out, and be ready to use a manual method when the thing broke down, as it often did.

Nancy soon found herself asking critical questions of the hospital environment. The "old philosophy" that the medical practitioner makes all the decisions irked her. She preferred to involve people holistically in their own treatment. When a grade nine immunization program was being developed in one school, she wondered why the students and parents weren't represented at the planning meetings. She wondered why "traditional" training methods persisted, leaving frightened nurses to learn through "trial and error" on nervous patients She described her own ways of teaching people nursing procedures, which are reminiscent of the new cognitive apprenticeship models of training being endorsed in industry: Nancy demonstrates a procedure step-by-step, explaining what she's doing and why. She shows consequences of doing things differently. She guides the practice of the learner with coaching, then gradually moves the learner through repeated trials into confident independence.

When Nancy joined a team of nurses at a community health clinic in an inner-city area, she embarked on several years of what she described as being her most enjoyable work experience. The working room was tiny, noisy, and crowded. The work was always extremely busy and emotionally taxing because of the extreme needs of the community. Clients were often rude or behaved in unexpected ways. But what Nancy remembered most was the group of nurses squashed together who melded into a tight caring group as they struggled to survive personally and make a difference collectively at the clinic: "We would gather in groups, very informally, to be supportive of each other, to try to make sense of what was happening, and to learn and grow from the experiences each of us was having." Every nurse knew what everyone else was doing and saying because there was no privacy -- a situation Nancy now credits with the quantity of learning that took place. The lack of dividers, either physical or organizational, between people's work helped expedite the collective that formed. "Would it have been the same if we'd had our separate offices, and conditions been rosy? Here we were all for one." Jokes were exchanged, gifts were frequent, hugs plentiful. Everyone cared and felt cared for. As the group became tighter and stronger, they began to position themselves against the wider health community in an "us versus them" polarity. They volunteered to innovate programs, they criticized conventional policy, and began to see themselves as mavericks. The only thing that didn't work was a short-lived attempt to formalize the group process through weekly "team meetings" to discuss case problems and general issues. "Yuck," said Nancy.

The entire experience taught Nancy the collective power and personal confidence to be gained by surrendering one's ego to the group and becoming interdependent. She learned to focus on the primary objective of the task or the particular need to be met, rather than on her own fears or status or progress. She also learned that the established "system," however well-intentioned, often got in the way of the real work -- to meet the needs of the people -- and that core critical questions could lead to action that counts.

In particular, she began to move to a place where she was questioning the judgments about just what the needs were. She questioned the medical community's automatic assumption of authority, and the tendency to develop procedures without listening to and involving people:

> We had what were called "well baby clinics." I hate the name, but that's what they were called. People would bring their kids in to get immunized. So they would come for the needle -- but what we would give them was counseling. Whether they wanted it or not. So for instance, the appointment would start with lots of questions -- how old is your baby, weight, etc. Then we would give the mom information -- nutrition, safety, you name it. But the needle didn't come until the end. They would be baffled sometimes -- this is all well and good, but when's the needle part? It was like, I'll give you a treat but first you've got to hear the story.
>
> I began to see an ethical problem. People weren't being offered the choice. We weren't treating them as adults -- we were imposing the information on them whether they wanted it or not. We had an agenda, a lesson plan, that wasn't being shared with them. I thought, what am I hiding here? Besides, the information was standardized. You told them certain things for a two-month old, a four-month old, and so on. As I think about it now, in light of some of the adult education courses I've taken, I think, good grief!

Nancy increasingly exercised her ability to reflect critically on systemic structures as well as her own practice. Once she taught a pre-natal class that didn't seem to be going well, so she asked participants for their evaluations mid-course. The prospective moms were brutally honest -- "I was devastated" -- but Nancy interpreted the situation as a personal learning opportunity and enlisted their help in redesigning the remainder of the course. The final outcome was so successful it reinforced for her both the values of humility over saving face, the importance of process, and the need to intertwine one's efforts with others in order to do the best job possible. Her earlier fears in nursing practice, revolving around humiliation of incompetence, were gone.

My last interview with Nancy took place in the agency where she coordinated life skills and other personal growth programs, a drop-in centre for women, a community kitchen, craft teaching sessions, and outreach for general community development. The center hummed with the talk of people at work. At the craft tables a First Nations outreach worker was teaching non-native women to make "dream-catchers". Children were playing at one end of the room, a small group of Spanish women were cleaning up the lunch things (soup and buns were served for about twenty-five), and another group was creating a poster. The phone rang frequently. When I located and waved to Nancy, I saw her having difficulty extracating herself from the women who approached her to ask questions, show her their work, or report information. The place reminded me somewhat of an elementary school classroom, with the same bright, warm, happily cluttered atmosphere. Nancy's role was a paradoxical study here: "I'm in charge, I have to take responsibility for how things run, but I don't appear to be in charge. Everybody participates in the decisions and tries to arrive at consensus."

This was a whole new learning experience that she was grappling with daily to figure out. I asked her how she was learning what she needed to do. Nancy explained:

> It's just the dynamic, moving with the flow. And based on who's here, what's the issue, what's the timing of the issue . . . Instinctually I'm moving with the moment, trying to be sensitive to all the [needs] while at the same time moving toward some agendas that are yours and some that aren't yours, like the funders' agendas. I don't want to make people do things that are not a fit for them. . . . And when you have a conversation, it's like you don't have a continuous conversation with anyone. It's more like all these bits of conversation, then you're always being interrupted. But that's good, you want to keep track of what people are feeling and thinking. . . But you need to know that you can't do everything, that you can't meet everyone's expectations, and that that's okay.

Nancy's way of describing her work here was much different from her descriptions of nursing skills in the hospital, where pre-determined formal theoretical frameworks, competency standards, and highly regulated structures governed how and what people learned.

Nancy's growth from a young nurse terrified at giving her first intravenous to a serene facilitator of community growth was brought about through her workplace experience. This experience was acted upon by her unique ability to see gaps and her increasing willingness to speak up about what she saw. The pattern of her work experience echoed that of others': an early positive experience belonging to a tight group with a strong identity taught her how to rely upon and trust other people, as well as to trust her own voice and judgment. Constant exposure to people demanding to be listened to taught her to empathize with perspectives very different from her own. An apparent compulsion to want to understand and help people, whether by teaching other nurses, by finding how to make a person well, or by fostering self-esteem among low-income women, seemed to have propelled her search for strategies that really worked. She learned that her actions could make a concrete difference to the situations she found herself in. And the continual flow of positive results from her actions confirmed her urge to ask "why", in order to get what she sought.

Persephone: Learning through questing, listening, and connecting

As I re-read Persephone's transcripts for the fourth time a year after our first interview, I found myself freshly amazed at the apparent tossed tumble that was her work history. She told snatches of stories that bounced from job to job, across Canada: "once, when I was working at the international development agency . . .", then "but that was when I was in [a large city], hanging out with the journalists 'on the hill'", or "after my accident, I got this job with the National Film Board and I was going all over in a wheelchair with my face all cut up . . .". She started a career in a police force at seventeen which she quit soon after, calling it an "abusive and unhealthy" place to work. She spent time as a secretary, a bookkeeper, a researcher, a development education officer, a workshop leader, worked as a department store and a jewelry store salesclerk, she was a social worker, an education registrar, a pastoral counselor, an administrator. In various community college certificate programs she had studied theology, social work, community development, and adult education. Finally now, in her fifties, she had embarked on a lifelong dream and enrolled in full-time studies towards her B.A. degree. Persephone labeled herself a "quester", a term she learned in a workshop about career development. She believed that her work history displayed her constant "search for something, for meaning, for a place I fit in." Until she found a way to name this search as a legitimate "quest", she said "I felt inferior, that I was unstable, always changing jobs."

When I arrived at the Christian family services agency where Persephone worked as a counselor and workshop facilitator, I was struck by its sense of peaceful order. As Persephone led me through the quiet building, she nodded hello to the nuns we passed, poked her head into the cheery staff room for a brief joke where some women were gathered drinking tea and laughing, and into the back offices. Persephone is a tall woman with sharp eyes, who smiles warmly and moves and speaks with thoughtfulness and deliberation. As she settled into a chair in her boss's office ("My office is just an open cubicle, and Tom is away today"), she said she was looking forward to this project exploring her workplace learning. Learning was a topic that fascinated her, and she viewed my study as a way to understand workplace learning better herself. She was already talking about what she'd noticed of her own ways of knowing in this job as I scrambled to plug in the tape recorder. More than two hours later I checked my watch and exclaimed at the passage of time, but Persephone was serene. There seemed here to be none of the anxiety I sensed in the class, the self-consciousness and self-doubt, the need for validation from others. Here she seemed in control, she knew what she was doing and she had a clearly defined presence and function.

To me, the work life Persephone described indeed seemed to be a scrambly series of endings and beginnings, of packing up and moving on. "I love packing, the anticipation" she told me. She quit jobs quickly that threatened her need for freedom and personal connection to others. The police force she remembered as "horrible" because of the "abusive males". Another job in the archives forced her to type little cards all morning with no variation or human interaction, and she quit at noon the first day ("I went out for lunch and just never went back -- took them three days to realize I'd gone"). Jobs she liked were characterized by the unfamiliar, the novel: creative projects, opportunities to meet new people, challenges to figure out how to get something done:

> For seven years I worked for something called Personnel Pool, which meant every other day or every other week you were in a different work environment. This was office work. For me it could be a variety of things because I did secretarial and I also did bookkeeping. And I also did funny little things that, they'd have weird jobs like hospitality and registration at a big, big conference, or contacting every sanctuary in Canada for ... something. And I would get those jobs and just sort of waltz in and, you know, you were always sort of flying by the seat of your pants and it wasn't even work that I enjoyed doing. I hated being a secretary. But I just really enjoyed all the new experiences.
>
> And if you didn't like it you could leave. Like, once I worked for the National Archives. There were sixty women in one area, all with typewriters. And I had to type in all these languages for these library cards. And by noon, I mean, I couldn't stand it. And I left for lunch and never went back. It took them three days before they knew I wasn't there. And I just thought, "no. I'm not doing this." And I just walked out. And I, you know, I've walked out on very few things in my life but that was one of them. Because you sat there, you were totally anonymous, you had no interaction with anyone beside you and you just typed these cards out for the library. That, to me, is very painful, restrictive.

In many ways Persephone seemed to surf the job market like a water beetle, like the way people surf the Internet. She liked to try things out, taste new experiences in the company of people who "know". But before she became an "expert" in something, she moved on. She liked to watch and listen, often satisfied with her participation as an audience to the main action. She didn't seem to think of herself as a radical agent of change but as a continuous learner: when she met intolerable conditions she packed up and moved. Her learning focused on meaning-making, figuring out how others thought -- not necessarily on shaping the world or solving its problems.

She was a self-described people-watcher. She spent time at the department store observing people: "I learned a lot about how people treat their kids when they're shopping -- what I would call child abuse is acceptable in a store. I watched the security guys abuse their power with the shoplifters. I observed how the store managers would be demeaning to the women at the cash register." She was in awe of the "brilliant people" at the Press Club in Ottawa: well-read, well-traveled, well-experienced doing "incredible things", engaged in interesting conversation. Persephone said, "I think, wow, there's power" and she felt lucky to be there. When she was on a planning committee for a video on family violence produced for church priests, she liked most listening to the "interesting" people who worked on the video.

The highlights of her work career that she described, in terms of peak learning experiences, were projects where she created articles or events with reasonably "free rein", projects that immersed her in hard work, and enabled her to meet people who were interesting and knowledgeable. She always picked jobs that offered scope for her creativity: "I don't just want to control decisions, to challenge things, I *need* to." Her only unsurpassable difficulties in her current position were caused by a boss who told her what she could and couldn't do, taking authority in projects she thought were hers. The scope she sought was local and particular rather than grand and sweeping. She spent hours of detail preparing the newsletter for the pastoral social service agency. She loved designing each monthly Catholic Women's League meeting around a theme like "Weavings in our lives", using candles, song, cloths, and prayer to create a holistic and powerful experience.

Jobs fell into her lap throughout her life, although she said she'd never made much money at them and didn't really care if she did. At one point after a few years at home raising her daughter, she found herself depressed and desperate to work. On her knees, she prayed in tears for a way to be useful, to "feel part of this world". That afternoon the priest phoned her with an offer of work, to write a booklet in two weeks about the Catholic church. Despite knowing little about Vatican II and post-Vatican and being somewhat fearful of the enormity of the topic, she happily accepted.

How did Persephone learn what she needed to know to write the booklet, to adapt so flexibly to all the different work environments and life situations fate landed her in? She said she learned by osmosis. In a new situation, she watched closely, and found out who could and would answer questions. She found documents that gave hints about the environment or the job. Mostly she tried things out in the company of people who knew. And of course, she was prepared to commit long hours, sometimes without remuneration, and to do jobs that others may have found unpleasant. (Her boss "passed off" to Persephone all the especially irate callers at the agency. She said she was able to remain calm and defuse their anger, and she talked with empathy about the "horror" of their troubles, but the work was draining.) She said she earned respect by working hard.

Most of all Persephone emphasized listening and conversation throughout our talks about work experience. She seemed to have learned through her work experiences that the most significant objective in any situation is making a communicative connection with people. When she managed the jewelry store she eventually pulled up two chairs to her counter and put out the coffee pot because she found people wanted to talk more than buy. She genuinely enjoyed learning about people's lives. She found that working through her own experiences with abuse and family violence, and "healing" herself, enabled her to appreciate others' pain, to reach out and to know what to say to help. The key for her seemed to be seeking the point where she could connect with another life in a moment of mutual understanding. She tried to explain ways that this activity of conversation and listening was useful and transferable knowledge: "I'll go over a scenario in my mind, and recognize some common denominator, and it's definitely families which is who we serve," or "You learn a lot about yourself and just by doing that helps you come to understand things more."

The point about Persephone's listening that was clearly evident to me was that through years of attending to the heartbeat of what others said, she developed an empathic attitude and accompanying set of subtle conversation skills that naturally attract and invite people to speak their pain, share their stirrings and utter their dreams. This is a delicate skill, immensely valuable in Persephone's churchwork of counseling families and couples. But this urge and competence to listen was not necessarily valued or rewarded in the workplaces Persephone had been in. Her tendency to focus on listening to understand, rather than listening towards action-oriented productivity, relegated her to the sidelines of the workplace. Combined with her penchant for hard work and her willingness to tackle anything new or difficult, Persephone was probably easy to take advantage of in offices. (When the workshop she developed for single parents sparked huge response in a parish group the agency had been trying to motivate, her boss agreed to let Persephone continue the program provided she was willing to donate without pay her weekend hours to running future meetings). The boundaries she set for herself circumscribed small, particular, local projects or temporary jobs in which she could have creative control and on which she systematically spent hours. Her richly variegated quilt of her career pattern had stitched in whatever came up that seemed interesting. She did not mention longings for involvement in the main action projects nor did she seem interested in system-wide understandings of the various organizations she had worked in. She liked and excelled in the tender, the human, the one-on-one encounters. Above all she liked to absorb, and was quick to do so, as a learner. She did not talk much about all the instrumental knowledge she'd learned to survive in various jobs, nor did it seem terribly important to her. It was all simply "osmosis": quickly absorbed, used as needed, then just as quickly forgotten when she moved on. What she carried with her was a deepening sense of the significance of people, and growing skills in forming rich, authentic connections with them.

Elizabeth: Learning to survive as a critical thinker in a rigid bureaucracy

Elizabeth struck me as a no-nonsense woman from the first time I met her, apparently thoughtfully critical of anything and everything. She could be counted on to raise unsettling questions, to confront people with their own contradictions, and to display impatience when faced with what she thought was human stupidity or obstinacy. Her sharp British accent and her rather stern manner seemed to lend her an air of authority that sometimes intimidated other participants.

I found out from our snatches of conversation that she was currently heading up a major change initiative in her government department, one of the most traditional and bureaucratic of the provincial offices. Elizabeth was working directly with the Deputy Minister to design the "vision". She was reading all sorts of current books on change, chaos theory, leadership and vision. She was excited by the new materials she'd encountered about learning organizations, and wrote elegant, compelling papers in class about the glories of liberal education, or proposing grand schemes for changing the workplace. I wanted to know how this champion for radical change had been nurtured in a rigid bureaucracy.

Elizabeth asked me to come to her downtown government office for our first tape-recorded conversation. She described in some detail the organization in which, I was surprised to learn, she had spent her entire working career. The department managed the work of seven hundred employees, in seven different technical disciplines in areas of technical safety, occupational health and safety, and labor legislation, "directing their efforts towards intervention and enforcement in order to maintain standards and bring about regulatory compliance." Each discipline was governed in a separate bureaucratically-organized branch with up to seven levels of hierarchy. Many employees were male and "old-fashioned". A strong "traditional" public sector union attempted to maintain existing jobs relying on "old skills" and employee hierarchies dictated by legislated classification schemes. Employees were positioned to reject the new learning and continuous improvement changes that the department's administration wanted to introduce.

After obtaining her Master's degree in Sociology and marrying a "brilliant" but apparently "pathological" professor of sociology, she started working with this department. Her job was to deliver training for business and industry in principles of human rights. She and two other women on her team traveled the province and "had a ball". What Elizabeth remembered most was their cooperative team work and the lively creativity of the work: they enjoyed freedom from bosses and regulations and worked directly with clients. By the time she had been moved to Employment Standards Investigations she had remarried, this time a man in her office. Both the marriage and the job were "rotten". The file-driven work was dull and highly regulated and Elizabeth said she stagnated, and wasn't learning anything anymore. She felt surrounded by "dumb people" ("my supervisor had only a grade 10 education"). For the next eight years she felt slowly strangled at home and at work, but she believed she needed both the salary and the man, who had turned out to be a snake: "I was still trying to make a happy-ever-after marriage and live out my mother's expectations". Continually frustrated by inanity and problems that appeared so obvious to her she couldn't understand others' obtuseness of vision, Elizabeth continued to challenge procedures and assumptions at work, "always leading the charge". She described the entire situation as "poisonous" and explained that in retrospect, "I should have gotten out".

She jumped at the chance to move north as director of a rural regional office. There she met a challenging staff: a group of building, electrical, and plumbing inspectors she thought of at first as "orangutangish, gross, chauvinistic" -- used to fat expense accounts and mean to boot. The contrast she personified struck her plainly later: she described herself as educated, urban, speaking with a "funny accent," and female. Yet the task of creating a "team" out of this crew who so clearly disliked her was motivating. She said she was "100%" committed for the two years she spent in that office. She traveled throughout the region extensively, worked long hours and said she learned a lot. When people began to like her and appreciate her, she learned to like people. As she learned to listen to needs and find ways to form teams to meet them, as she saw the results of her actions, she learned about empowerment and team process. The whole north office experience represented peak learning in her career; she felt she was really making a difference. Then the department "parachuted" her back to Edmonton.

A new Deputy Minister with a new vision consistent with the new government focus on "reinventing and restructuring" was enticing for Elizabeth. The DM himself was exciting, "brilliant" and gutsy, with great respect for learning and an understanding of its complexity, and a straight-ahead non-nonsense approach. Elizabeth found herself a training consultant working directly with him and a small team of "bright" people. She wrote out an argument for a focus on continuous learning in the organization ("in response to a fight with the guy in the next office") that emphasized process, empowerment, big picture thinking, critical reflection, continuous innovation, team work, and responsibility. Her writings were adopted as the new departmental training principles, and she was placed on a team developing a system for implementing this new vision of continuous learning. "It's like being an artist," she said, "I was really flying." The demands of the task led her to voracious outside reading, to attending conferences on learning organizations, and to taking university extension courses in adult education. Her enthusiasm was radiant.

So when I next met Elizabeth after a few months, I was surprised to find her somewhat despondent and disillusioned. To her horror, the word "competency" had been used in a conventional "human resources" way to create a training calendar for the organization. The calendar transformed her holistic vision of "free-floating learning happening through group settings" into little segments of competency-based training through traditional stand-up delivery of classroom courses. When I leafed through this calendar, I myself was genuinely puzzled by the mashing together of behaviorist approaches and transformative change: hundreds of tiny boxes filling complicated-looking charts promised to teach people "skills" like "adapting flexibly to change". Elizabeth believed, through her own experience that was increasingly being validated by her outside reading on organization theory, that the department had to progress beyond an emphasis on "knowing" and "regulating". The key to continuous learning, she felt strongly, was to involve people, get them excited, in creating knowledge. Elizabeth shuddered at the growing mass of memos and newsletters announcing the department's changes and "learning" vision in its accustomed top-down manner, dictating policies "like parents telling kids," using words like "must" and "should".

Her own work situation was now shadowed by a supervisor who kept staff on tight leashes, doling out tasks, dictating procedures and rewarding or punishing as appropriate to keep the ducks in a row. Elizabeth's work was occupied in bus-i-ness: planning and delivering workshops for this training calendar she didn't support philosophically. She gestured resignedly to her computer screen. "Right now I'm developing a challenge exam for communications, something I've never done before. It's just a task" for which there was no foreseeable purpose, no clear link with a project, and no guarantee of use or usefulness. She explained that she often got into trouble confronting what she saw as sheer stupidity. She questioned decisions (why give an information session before people even care about the information?), and she often neglected the social niceties that she said she kept realizing too late were considered more essential than tasks by her colleagues.

> I should have left years ago, get out of this rut. It's become a knowing organization, knowing procedures. These are the procedures that you will follow. But you've got to get beyond knowing to involving people in creating knowledge. That's more than telling them, that's exciting them, using all their senses and emotions. I get really lost when it comes to following procedures. I don't have a very logical mind, it doesn't matter if it's not definite for me. I work it out as I go along.

Elizabeth believed that the organization had fallen back into its comfortable bureaucratic practices, and she'd apparently lost hope that real change could happen: "I seem to have lost my connection to where it is we're going. The mental model I hold in my head of what this organization can be and should be. . . it's just stopped now." Although the DM had asked her to follow up the training vision with more plans, she felt stranded. There was no "collegial support structure, someone to bounce the ball with." She needed "a little bit of a push, some help," but there wasn't any. Her trust in him had frayed, too: at one point he feigned ignorance of the promotion he promised her.

And yet she continued to stay with the department. She explained, "You get to a point where you make too much money to leave". Perhaps it's partly habit at this point in her mid-forties; she believed she held onto her job for practical reasons for several years while her marriage was unstable, then after its break-up she held on to support herself and her daughter. To keep herself from going crazy in a tediously boring and strictly bounded job in the past, she sold Mary Kay cosmetics in her spare time. Similarly now she sought avenues outside the workplace to express and extend her learning about learning organizations. She'd published two articles about her work implementing change, she'd been asked to write a chapter about public sector change for a USA book edited by Karen Watkins, and she was looking seriously into further graduate work when I last talked with her. What a pity her employing organization was apparently uninterested in reaping the benefits of this energy and knowledge!

Throughout her career Elizabeth seemed to have felt a stranger in her workplace. As a British woman with a graduate degree who was prone to critically questioning regulation and structure, she frequently struggled against what she perceived to be the stupidity of hierarchical practices and narrow-mindedness of a unionized, largely blue-collar male workplace. Her recurring complaint about the people she found herself working for and with was, "they are so uneducated!" All her work life she sought out "bright" people, people who "sparkle", while she tried to tolerate the people around her. She described herself as a "scattered" learner, following her curiosity in many directions. Her understandings grew in decidedly unsystematic and often surprising ways.

Elizabeth's story raises deep issues about the drive to learn and the organization's pathological crushing of creative passion. Questions about loyalty emerge. Why did someone with as much intelligence, creativity, abilities and talents as Elizabeth continue to give so much of herself to a department she had to fight continually? Why was she so hard on herself? Even now, when so many people with less experience, expertise, and natural talent than Elizabeth are heading into independent human resources consulting, she seemed to doubt her ability to make it: "there's a lot of competition out there." Nor did she ever go back to university to pursue further education among "bright" people. Although she said periodically she had thought of doing so, she had difficulty generating enough drive: what does a PhD get you?, she asked herself, and does the world really need more MBAs? She pursued learning opportunities with enthusiasm in her own reading and extension courses, but was losing the trust in her workplace that sparked her energy to learn on the job or for the job.

Her hope for her work in the future, she explained, was to wait for something to drop: "if they gave me the package now [voluntary severance incentive] I'd walk." Although she admitted to feeling a certain bitterness and regret when reflecting on her work-life with this organization, Elizabeth also talked about "letting go" and "being at peace" with herself, reading books that gave her "solace" while struggling to survive the bureaucracy's efforts to stifle her critical challenges. Meanwhile she waited patiently, and continued looking for ways to keep learning and questioning.

Carla: Learning to build community of excellence, service and accountability

I learned about Carla through a friend who said that if Carla were transferred to Calgary he would move too, to take his banking business to whatever branch Carla was managing. A unique in-branch educational program for her employees designed by Carla was copied by other district managers around Edmonton. In 1996 Carla was the only Edmonton branch manager in her company to win a prestigious award. At our last lunch on a cold January day she told me what she thought would be the highlights of the Caribbean cruise (part of the award) that she would be enjoying at the end of the month: meeting other effective managers with innovative ideas, hearing more about global trends and the future horizons of the company, and asking questions of senior management.

At our first interview, squeezed into a lunch hour in Carla's office at the bank branch she managed, she seemed shy and gentle in approach, yet assertive and very firm about certain principles. A dark-haired, petite woman, her eyes often darted outside her door, which remained open throughout our conversation. I had the impression that although she was listening closely to my questions and engaged fully in thinking through her ideas, she was completely aware at all times of what was happening outside that door. She spoke softly, laughed frequently with a gentle ripple, and moved with a certain "quiet", a calm assurance. The first thing she described to me was the responsibility of banking, which she evidently took very seriously:

> I'm in charge of the bank to ensure that good customer service is provided. I'm responsible for the whole thing. I am in charge of all its assets and also of actuating certain growth standards of the bank. I must ensure that the branch is run to meet these detailed growth targets. I must account for all the dollars for the audit and control and security of the branch. Everything from the profits and losses to the stationery to the heating costs to the parking lot. Everything.

She said, referring to performance appraisals given to her, that she hated the word "satisfactory": "If I'm not in the top range, I'm just a failure in my eyes." She continually examined various dimensions of the bank's operation, looking for "deficiencies" and ways to improve it. She wanted excellence, and she worked long hours to achieve it.

Carla's style of management was "hands-on": she personally ensured that the details were looked after. She was aware of the phones ringing and how long it took her staff to answer them and resolve the issue. She picked up the phone and encouraged banking representatives to do so too ("Don't just leave it to the receptionist!"); when the customer line-ups began forming Carla worked alongside her staff. As shy as she was meeting people, she insisted on being "out and about" in the branch as much as possible, greeting customers and working with staff: "Sometimes I'm a nag -- I have a fairly good memory."

'Nagging' was one way of ensuring excellence standards for her staff. Carla believed strongly in personal accountability for everyone. A central core of her management was setting high standards of thoroughness and attention to detail, communicating and modeling these standards, and following up. "The staff come to know that they might as well do what they needed to do because I'm not going to forget about it." And perhaps a crucial underpinning of her style was her emphasis on hard work. "I expect that as a manager of people I will be working harder than my staff." Harder meant long hours: she arrived at 7:30 a.m. and often didn't leave until 6 or 7 p.m.; it meant diligence and persistence, as when tracking down a detail to solve a persnickety problem; harder also seemed to mean going beyond what was required, such as when Carla got ideas for projects to improve the branch that she often had to complete at home. "I feel great, about my health and my life, if I'm working at maximum."

Carla stressed "listening" frequently in our conversations, both as something she valued in staff and as a mainstay of her own management style. As she moved among her people constantly throughout the day, when she conducted staff meetings or one-on-one talks with employees, she tried to "really listen to what their issues are, or just how their day is going." A constant flow of open dialogue seemed to be key: "I really like to get everyone involved in the discussion, get their opinions before I give mine." She joked with the staff who were all female, and reinforced the commonalties they shared. She encouraged people to care about and help each other do their work. "Gossip" or cattiness was strongly disapproved. Although she said it would certainly save time to just send people notes on E-mail, she valued the benefits of personal contact more.

One project that demonstrated to me Carla's commitment to building a sense of community in her branch was the personal reflections book she thought of doing with her staff. The problem to be addressed was new or minimally experienced "junior" staff struggling to learn the practical details, the how-tos and people skills of their jobs as personal banking representatives (PBRs), alongside a few experienced "senior" staff. There wasn't time or money to shut down the operation and train everyone. Besides, as Carla points out, gesturing to a shelf of binders behind her in the office, "all you get is the same old thing -- who ever opens one of those big binders after a course?" Carla's idea of a small book for everyone grew from her own use of a daily book of "reflections for effectiveness" -- a quick read of a new thought or practical idea charged her day. If people are like her, she reasoned, using books best that are always at the fingertips, designed for quick, easy, "fun" reference, then a book like that on the job might be more useful than other training methods. She envisioned a resource that more than anything shared some "really good activities that we personally do, not just the bank stuff, but personal things we do when dealing with people." The resource also would contain tips and techniques, quick guides to procedures, and answers to sticky questions might be the best aid to new PBRs learning the tiny details that are part of an experienced PBR's repertoire, learned through years of trial and error.

Further, Carla reasoned, "a woman cares about the details... women like things that look classy. I didn't want them to receive just a bunch of sheets stapled together." So she worked with a publisher to design a slim, narrow, black-and gold booklet. She found someone to create cartoons -- she knew she liked things that were fun to read, not predictably grey prose and a bureaucratic design that took itself too seriously. And who better to create the content of the book than the experienced PBRs? Carla convened meetings with staff who collaboratively developed the text through their own questions and answers. Even the cartoons were based on funny things that had happened in their own branch.

Now all PBRs have been given a copy of the book. It was well-received inside her branch and outside her district, attracting attention of upper management levels. Evaluation results weren't yet available to show the actual effectiveness of the booklet in staff development and improved performance, but even the effort to put it together was, she felt, a good learning experience and community builder. Her reaction was somewhat shy: "I never thought of myself as a leader."

Carla's approach to management struck me as essentially based on an educational model. Rapid and momentous changes have completely changed the bank's operation and required employees' orientation to their work being constant learning. New technology results in new products and services every year -- telephone banking is a recent example. The company's increasing emphasis on customer service in the past few years demanded that staff develop strong skills in communication. Changing cultural demographics in Carla's community necessitated extra sensitivity to understand people's different needs and approaches to personal financial management. Her branch now offered service in seventeen languages, but language was only the beginning step in understanding and meeting the diverse cultural needs. The technology and service emphasis also drastically reduced and reorganized staff so that personal banking representatives now had to perform an increasing multitude of functions, giving "one window" service to customers. Senior management was also now promoting "learning organization" principles, derived from writers like Peter Senge, stressing innovation, learning skills, and knowledge production and sharing; branch managers were expected to integrate these principles into their business.

Carla's response to the seemingly constant change seemed to be to act as a teacher: she learned what was needed; opened doors for others to learn; demonstrated, guided and encouraged their learning; set and communicated clear outcomes for learning and performance standards to meet; evaluated the learning and followed up with further instruction. She said she liked to keep learning herself: when there was nothing new to figure out or help people learn, when the job plateaued and became "just" running the branch and doing two or three things at once, she said "I get bored." Even her ways of talking about staff resembled educational more than management rhetoric: she talked of helping them believe they could do something, of treating them the way she expected them to be. This wasn't simply a "warm fuzzy" human relations approach. Carla insisted on high standards

Since she started with the bank at the age of seventeen, Carla took as many courses offered by the company as she could. But she described her way of learning as pragmatic: "Come on, let's do it. Don't waste my time for three weeks showing me, telling me all these little things." Her way of learning seemed to start with a clear sense, often derived from a role model, of what she wanted to be able to do, or what she wanted to figure out or solve. Then she plunged in, trying things and analysing what was happening according to her own learned company standards for excellence and her preference for feeling that she was "working to the maximum." Carla was a goal-setter and high achiever. She knew she wanted to be a bank manager from the start. This was how she always did her work, she says: "I get a clear picture of what I want, then I go after it." She watched people closely to observe the consequences of her and her staff's behavior, which perhaps explained why her branch was so successful delivering flexible customer service to a very culturally diverse community.

Role models were more important in Carla's learning than self-directed research, teachers and their explanations, or formal educational experiences (she had never taken a post-secondary course outside in-house courses offered by the company). An author could be a role-model for her (she named Stephen Covey, author of Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, as an important influence on her working approaches). Perhaps the most significant part of her workplace learning, in terms of developing a foundation of values and skills and attitudes that had guided her throughout her career, was the role modeling provided by two older women who taught her the job of being a teller when she was a teenager. Both women spent much time with her, and Carla seems to have felt cared for, even a bit "fought over" as each tried to "mold me." What she described now was not various skills they taught her, but what she observed about the way they each acted: "they knew every client by name and served every client to the maximum," "their thoroughness in everything they did," "their loyalty, their commitment to protecting the bank's assets" as though the money was their own. In other words, it seemed not to be the active teaching or mentoring they did with her so much as the power of their presence in action, the details of which impressed themselves indelibly in her memory. There seemed to have been two reasons she watched so closely and thus learned so much from these women: she admired the effective results they obtained, and she was quite fond of them, her feelings probably nurtured in part by their own apparent caring for her.

Carla's story illustrates how workplace learning can shape an effective way of working. The corporate culture of the company she stayed with for close to thirty years reinforced values that resonated from the start with what seemed to be her core sense of the world: hard work, thorough attention to detail, personal accountability for excellent standards in all work, and caring well for people's needs. The increasing responsibility and scope of her work positions offered opportunity to flex her intellect, to spark her creativity, and to release her passion for working hard. The nature of bank management presented her with a continual source of technical and interpersonal challenges, engaging her compulsion to keep learning new skills. What I am tempted to call her "teaching orientation" with her employees seemed to emanate not from a compulsion to share her knowledge and skills so much as a clear picture of everyone performing to the maximum of their potential. She worked hard to model what she believed and knew, perhaps because so much of her most important learning came through others' modeling. Although the company supported her learning through formal training and recognition of what she had learned, the more important incentive to her learning seemed to be the achievements she recognized herself, in terms of results that she was proud of. And by far the most significant events in her workplace learning unfolded in her informal apprenticeship, as a young impressionable newcomer to the company. The power of role modeling was evident in the strong values of loyalty, accountability, thoroughness and excellence, values she adhered to now that she credited to the models in her apprenticeship. And the long-lasting nature of learning through role modeling was clear in the holistic behavioral details that Carla could absorb by watching two women intently so long ago, and that she could recount with vivid immediacy today.

Carolyn: Learning how to listen and help

Like many of the women who took part in this study, Carolyn found she got "bored" with repetitive or predictable work, or work involving tasks she already knew how to do well. So she actively sought the job positions which generated so much of her workplace learning. She indicated she was happiest when the work projects continually changed, keeping her interested. Currently she was an adult educator serving a government department employing an average of 2500 people. Carolyn talked little about its structure, operations, purposes, policies or administration. Although she was most definitely a continuous learner devoted to continuous improvement in her job, she seemed to be uninterested in "systems thinking." What interested her and what dominated her stories about her work were the individual people she worked with to help learn and who she learned from.

Carolyn didn't have any particular aspirations for teaching or counseling work when she began working after high school with this provincial department as a clerk. Even now, she was not ambitious so much as she just peacefully explored whatever attracted her notice that seemed worthwhile. And what was most worthwhile to Carolyn were projects and endeavors that helped people.

Carolyn spoke rarely during the class in Adult Learning and Development that I facilitated, but she gazed at anyone speaking with an intensity of concentration that was disquieting for some speakers. During the one-on-one conversations for this study, I found it exceedingly difficult to look away from Carolyn's continuous and intense eye contact to write notes or adjust the tape-recorder. The effect was almost mesmerizing. It made sense to me to hear Carolyn describe what for her were the most important elements of her work as a facilitator in the human resources department of a large provincial government department: listening to people, encouraging them to listen to each other, and helping them find the inner resources to believe in themselves. She emphasized: "Communication is key." She also frequently returned to a key theme threading throughout her career: "I have a need to help."

Our first tape-recorded conversation was held in a training room in her downtown office tower. To my eyes, used to the clean bright large rooms, the colourful comfortable new furniture and the expansive windows in the facility where I taught, this training room seemed depressingly grey and almost shabby to my eyes. Vinyl-topped tables, some with broken corners, had been pushed together seminar-style to make a mass in the centre of the room, leaving only a small margin of space around the edges for the industrial orange chairs. I wondered, how does a teacher keep flagging attentions motivated under these gray fluorescent lights? The room felt cold and had no windows -- none of the training rooms did. We sat at one end of the mass of tables, I feeling quite dwarfed by the room and Carolyn pulled up to the table as if she were attending a business meeting.

Three beliefs emerged as pivotal in her approaches. First, Carolyn believed that people, like herself, must take charge of their own lives and "own their choices", rather than blaming someone else for what happens or doesn't happen in their marriage or their work. Second, she believed that much difficulty in communication and relationships in work and life are generated by people "preacting", reacting to a given situation by interpreting and misunderstanding other's actions according to meanings derived from other contexts. Thus a goal for her, and she believed for others, needed to be learning to recognize all this "past baggage" and know when it's cluttering up the way one is perceiving a situation. Finally, Carolyn believed that people sharing their experiences was a most powerful way to learn. I was certainly convinced of the significance of this belief from her own communication approaches.

Her work currently involved delivering "training" workshops and handling employee counseling. When she first got the training job, she was assigned the task of teaching technical skills in one-shot workshops. Some of the material to be covered was unbearably dull or had limited apparent relevance for participants -- such as memorizing policies. But Carolyn from the beginning found she had a knack for making workshops interesting and producing good results: people remembered the material. She experimented with activities, games, and other teaching methods. No one taught her. Instead, Carolyn seemed propelled by the demands of the task to explore and invent: how can we use our time together in such a way that everyone knows the stuff at the end, and knows why they know it?

In this bureaucratic environment she had settled into a position delivering the programs she liked best: developing people's reflective learning skills, communication skills, self-esteem, abilities to listen to and understand one another. She was quite happy delivering programs others had designed, and although she modified and adapted the design in the artistic unfolding of her own workshop, she did not feel a need to control the program development. Her major interest was managing the dynamic and multi-leveled flow of the people in the workshops: becoming attuned to their needs and fears, watching them work through new ideas. Carolyn described herself as very intuitive, and narrated stories of the almost spooky uncanniness of her intuitive perceptions or predictions outside the workplace. Inside the training classroom where she facilitated workshops, her intuition was alert to "read" the most subtle non-verbal cues from people. After the workshops she mulled through all these cues, sorting and interpreting to make meaning of exchanges she had had with people, acknowledging actions and activities that worked well, deciding what should happen next, sometimes noting things not to do again. She said this process was like replaying a script, and she always worked through this "script" on the bus ride home after a workshop.

> Reflection is very important in how I learn. I ask, how did I impact so-and-so? I'm self-aware, I try to help others become aware, to get comfortable sharing. The spiritual, emotional are sometimes the most important, and we don't always attend to these facets.
>
> I was always interested in the 'why'. I used to drive my sister crazy. Even now my husband says, why do you always want to know why something is, or . . .And I've learned from Anne how to review participant evaluations and ask why. You look at the good ones, too. You ask "WHY did this person say that this workshop changed their whole life? Why is what this person experienced different than this other person? What does this tell us?" From Rick I learned: trust yourself. Don't take anything at face value. And then, I've learned to listen to my intuition. I'm pretty intuitive, and I've had experiences -- body language tells me a lot. I can read when a student is in pain, or is puzzled about something.

She described herself as a very "private" person, who preferred not to work intimately with a variety of people. Typically, she found that she would "get close to" only one or two other individuals in any workplace environment, a tendency she traced to her patterns of forming friendships in elementary school. At her current worksite, her close colleague was an "older lady" who had a desk next to Carolyn's and with whom Carolyn "shares the same kinds of values": honesty in relationships, life-long learning, respect, self-awareness, and social responsibility. But Carolyn also told stories showing the importance of her colleagues to her work. One time after she finished a successful workshop with a group of supervisors (a nail-biting experience, given the typical haughtiness of many senior staff in a learning situation where they are expected to regard someone with a much "lower" job classification as the teacher-expert-facilitator), she said she ran all over the office looking for someone to tell -- "I was so excited that I'd survived, let alone done well, and I was so disappointed that they'd all gone home." Working within a group meant there were others who *understood* with whom one could share the daily puddles and triumphs.

About her workplace learning, Carolyn stressed the value of reflection. After encounters with clients and workshop participants she asked herself, "How did I impact this person?" Carolyn said, "I was always interested in the why." After training sessions, she would examine the evaluations provided by participants. The question she asked was, "Why did this person say that this workshop changed their whole life? Why is what this person experienced different than this other person? What does this tell us?" Carolyn learned this skill by working with her supervisor, who analysed work as a way of practice, always asking "why" about situations. There was no judgmental valuing or critical offensiveness, just an inquiry with an eye to understanding an outcome more clearly, and improving something.

From another supervisor Carolyn said she learned, "Trust yourself. Don't take anything at face value." This self-awareness and valuing of the voices inside was now a cornerstone of what she tried to help other people realize. She stressed that for her, a significant learning was to trust her instincts. Her work showed her these instincts in action, and proved their power: facilitating a group put a person on the spot to make instant choices based on continual monitoring of subtle cues. One example was when one of her sessions, held in a windowless room, began to fade she suddenly had an idea -- she got participants to actually draw their own windows and what they dreamed of seeing out of them -- and she posted these pictures on the walls. She felt the courses she'd taken in adult education had been valuable mostly for validating and helping her to name the things she learned in her work experience. Over her years of educating adults she accumulated a vast store of knowledge, not just instrumental "what works" kinds of tools, but also deep beliefs about respecting learners, building on their experience, understanding psychological safety and the importance of building a community that people feel they belong to in a learning environment.

Carolyn's motive for learning anything new was the needs of those to whom she seems committed first and foremost: her individual clients. She was now taking, in her evening hours, courses in an adult education certificate program for new ideas and understandings to improve her workshops. She did a lot of "extras" that are time-consuming but that she believed helped her clients, like sending personal notes after each session to "let them know they were valued, showing their concerns, recognizing their value." She was supportive of the training department's new initiative to assess all programs more stringently, using concepts like "value-added learning", because she herself valued getting solid information she could use to improve her ways of helping people learn.

However more recently, Carolyn said she was beginning to think more in terms of the needs and directions of the larger organization within which her work unfolded. Her primary focus and her main interest guiding her workplace learning was still figuring out how to help her own individual clients to learn. But she said she was recognizing that this could only happen effectively within the context of the organization's overall changes like downsizing and the impact of these on people, the organization's view of "what we do here" and "where we're going", and the organization's own priorities. She was not necessarily interested in having input into these decisions or really understanding them thoroughly (she found herself tuning out of the staff development day spent discussing "learning organizations and all that stuff", preferring to ruminate about how her own clients must feel about these new policies and what she could do to help). One natural outgrowth of her expanded sense of her work within the organization was her willingness to share her teaching ideas with others. This happened as she developed confidence that her own teaching approaches were actually worth sharing.

Zoe: Learning who is Zoe and what is her purpose

Zoe, a former college teacher for many years, now worked in a university department as a senior administrator responsible for student services. From her comments in our class, I judged her to be intensely devoted to thoughtful, student-centered principles of lifelong learning and teaching to meet individual needs. Zoe seemed quietly gregarious, and talked frequently of the importance of collaborative learning and dialogue for college students as well as for educators and other faculty. She also struck me as the type of learner who manages to find something interesting for herself in every conversation, always seeking ways to turn an experience, even an unpleasant one, into something useful that she can apply in a different context. Though tall and visually arresting in her strikingly tailored appearance, Zoe's presence had a stillness that made her hard to notice in a group unless the listener paid close attention to the sharp, nuggetty questions she asked. She was so soft-spoken her voice could barely be heard on the tapes I had used to record our conversations. I was intrigued to discover that she was in fact licensed to practice as a lawyer, and I wondered what circuitous ribbon of decisions and what learnings unfolded along the path in her workplace journey from law through teaching to administration.

When Zoe started her career over twenty years ago as a lawyer in a small law firm (two lawyers besides herself), she described herself as being exceedingly shy and compliant. She was the only female lawyer in the firm where she started; the others scarcely spoke to her and most definitely did not invite her to join them at lunch. There was no deliberate exclusion here; it seems they just wouldn't have thought of it. Her first year in the firm was "an ordeal by fire." She would spend long hours alone, hunched over files ("law is a paper-based profession," said Zoe). Details of her performance were expected to meet perfectionist standards: although there was little help in "how" to do things, consequences for her mistakes could be severe. She frequently found herself in the middle of a critical dilemma demanding her immediate decision, but she didn't usually have the benefit of guidance or advice from those more experienced with such dilemmas. More than anything, she felt she was on her own in law. Zoe explained that although law firms are collectively responsible for each case, the lawyers work completely independently. New "apprentice" lawyers do not have much opportunity to watch the experienced lawyers in action: all they see are the finished products of the lawyers' work: the documents. Even today, claimed Zoe, the articling period for young lawyers is often frustrating and frightening.

The Zoe that emerged in her stories of the law firm was a woman who did what she was told, spoke to few unless spoken to, and sought help from the legal secretaries to complete the complicated array of documents that comprised the work. She seemed to accept the loneliness, the fear, and the gender bias as part of the conditions of the work. But after two years, in a pattern that was apparent through the rest of her career, she began searching the career advertisements. She soon found and landed the position of law instructor at a community college. She said she knew nothing of teaching. But undaunted (Zoe never seemed to have allowed a lack of vocational knowledge or skill to present an obstacle to her self-confidence), she learned quickly through the constant demands of the job to act, decide, solve this problem, find ways to help that student. The objective of her work seemed clear: to help students, mostly young women, learn the what, the how-to and the why-to stuff of law so that they could function effectively as legal secretaries. With her focus set on this objective, she experimented with strategies, kept her ears open for new strategies and suggestions, and watched the results carefully.

Although she enjoyed teaching very much with its continuous opportunities for creative expression and new learnings, and although she valued the collegial staff and supportive environment of the college, Zoe felt ready for a new challenge after a few years. She began keeping her eyes open, and sure enough an opportunity within the college soon presented itself. She was to manage the sprawling continuing education department.

Her first instrumental learnings in this job, she explained, were generated by the department's primary preoccupation: budgeting. As a cost-recovery operation, the bottom line had to be watched closely; course offerings and needs assessments had to be balanced carefully to generate sufficient revenue. By figuring out and working through the various tasks and considerations involved in the budget process, she found herself learning a whole new way of thinking and practicing, using skills she can enumerate now: understanding and balancing different people's and different department's perspectives and positions; assessing negative participant complaints and other crises through systematic problem-solving; finding sources of revenue; and making tough decisions.

Zoe also learned how to work as a member of a close-knit collegial office "team" ("we didn't call it that back then, but that's what it was"), a working situation she enjoyed tremendously. Up till now, her work as a lawyer and then as a teacher were conducted relatively autonomously. The infrequent interaction with colleagues was restricted to times away from the actual on-the-spot action of performing one's work. Now she was working closely every day with other people, "we were all clumped together" delegating and coordinating their various talents and knowledge, and making decisions that would affect them all. The birds-eye view of education that her job now gave her, especially in this "whole wonderful area of activity" of continuing education that Zoe hardly knew existed before, was new and fascinating for her. The culture was a bit different, too: the people here were "more rebellious" than the typical "mainstream daytime academics." The learning curve of this new job was steep and exciting.

Returning to her college classroom after the one-year secondment to manage the continuing education department was deflating to say the least. Systematic and appearing stoic as always, however, Zoe registered little emotion as she described this time. She took a college-offered course about "returning to the classroom after a work experience leave" which helped her recognize and name the feelings of going backwards, being constrained, and trying to get back the feel of teaching. But she missed the system-wide perspective of her management job. She missed the challenges of problem framing and decision-making. She missed being a part of the world outside the classroom.

So, Zoe took again to scanning the pages of the "Careers" section of the local newspaper for opportunities. One came along that put her back into post-secondary administration, which she had enjoyed so much, in an area she knew well and whose students she empathized with so warmly: the law faculty. "How long have you worked there now?" I asked. "Three years, two months, and one day," was her reply. Perhaps she had forgotten how competitive, non-collegial, fearful and chilly the environment there was. Maybe she had hoped that teaching styles would have changed over the years to emphasize students' needs and de-emphasize knowledge memorization. The job offered a wide scope of activity and a new perspective that offered lots of learning opportunity about a new world. "I never knew there were so many student awards," she said, and "Learning how to timetable 100 students and faculty -- No, I haven't learned that yet," she moans.

As much as she disliked the "chauvinism" and the isolationist, competitive environment, she enjoyed working with the students and actually being in a position to do something constructive to help them resolve issues. To satisfy her needs for collegiality and dialogue with like-minded educators she enrolled in an adult education course. Overall she had been managing until a recent incident had upset her like nothing else in her career. One student launched a complaint which turned into a charge of racism. The most upsetting part of this, said Zoe, was that the student lied. Her colleagues remained distant and the faculty was ambivalent about its position. While Zoe counted the days, she was finding her own support outside the workplace, and she was back to scanning the career advertisements.

Zoe's ways of coming to know and be competent in the practice of law, teaching, and management seemed to have varied according to the particular discipline. In each case, however, she sought out people to give her advice and support her through the insecurity of the difficult period of trial and error. She said that common lawyers' wisdom holds that 90% of what a person needs to know about law is learned by doing in practice. In her first job, she relied on the secretaries to show her what to do. To me this indicated a willingness to be humble, to display one's lack of competence unabashedly, and a willingness to be the "pest" one must become in a new workplace, asking questions every step of the way in completing new tasks.

Role models, though rare, were very helpful. A new lawyer had most access to role models in court, where Zoe said she learned a lot by watching: what phrases to use, what subtleties of protocol, what verbal, vocal, and even visual strategies to use to persuade the court of her client's position. Finally, Zoe also found a support group for herself by arranging to meet regularly with four other female lawyer friends from her law-school days. These get-togethers were invaluable, said Zoe, for answering those "What do you do when...?", and "Have you ever done one of these _____ forms?" questions. The group also gave her the human warmth and social contact she missed in her chilly workplace.

In teaching a broader range of practice is tolerated, leaving room for creative experimenting through trial-and-error. Zoe most valued four main resources that helped her become a teacher: (1) the feedback from students and the outcomes they demonstrated, the primary source of her learning about what teaching strategies work, what don't, and what are some unexpected benefits of various strategies; (2) informal between-class conversations with fellow colleagues to ask for advice about the communicative dimensions of teaching-learning relationships ("What would you do with a girl who files her nails through the whole class?") and share suggestions about the pragmatic subtleties of various activities ("When I use group work I always..."); (3) professional development sessions offered by the college ("I think I attended every one of those meetings in the fourteen years I taught there," Zoe muses); and (4) books on teaching, as starter sources for instructional ideas. This was how she learned about learning styles, about collaborative group learning, about ways to promote active student involvement.

In her administrative work, the range and scope of each position exposed Zoe to a whole new realm of activities, each with its interlocking forms, functions, procedures, and personnel. A more transcendent viewpoint enabled her to see and understand how more of the world works: as an eternally curious person who loves to learn, Zoe particularly enjoyed working with this "big picture". Issues that needed attention, budgets that needed balancing, and problems that needed to be perceived then resolved all forced her into a learning position. She was surrounded by people who could answer her questions and show her what to do. But she also took initiative to secure the resources she needed to figure things out, whether finding a support group for dialogue, or seeking courses to glean whatever useful insights she could. Zoe also worked long hours and persisted at something she needed to learn to accomplish something until she had learned it: she once stayed at the college until midnight to figure out the computer system so she could find ways of obtaining more revenue. As she pointed out, she could afford to give everything to her work since she had no husband or children making other demands on her.

Zoe's experience in the workplace seemed to have taught her not only what she enjoys doing and what she does well, but also how she and other people learn. Her jobs, not her formal university training as a lawyer, gave her the richest educational experiences of her adulthood. Her interaction with people organized around accomplishing something or reaching a goal, the challenges of defining and figuring out tasks, the consequences of her own actions, and the opportunity to observe different domains of the world were the developmental vehicles through which she learned the skills and knowledge she values most. She credited her work experience as changing her from being "terribly shy" to becoming a "good leader". But she continued to search for herself: was she a lawyer? a teacher? an administrator?

Six months after this portrait was written Zoe contacted me again, to tell me she'd finally quit her job. For the first time in her career history she did not have something else waiting for her. Yes, she said she was a bit worried about the mortgage, but mostly she was exhilarated. She quit over a "last straw". But mainly she knew she had to leave because she could no longer work in an environment where there was no moral "fit" between her own growing sense of call to a purpose, and the purposes and values of her workplace.

Fran: Learning to go through a door where nothing would look the same again

Fran had warm liquid eyes that seem crinkled into a permanent smile. She encouraged me to visit her at her acreage in the country, which is where all of our tape-recorded conversations took place. When I first arrived there on a brilliantly red-and-orange Indian summer morning, she was waiting for me at the front door. "You need to come and see my home if you want to understand me," she explained, and led me room by room through the house. Sun poured through the rooms and glinted on the polished hardwood. Pieces of furniture each had a heritage and a story, like the oiled-rich mahogany bed in the guest room that belonged to her grandparents. Nooks in the house here and there, like little sanctuaries separated from everything else, breathed secrets and dreams: her new desk and computer, newly uncrated, were waiting for her as she started a university degree; a corner covered with pictures, a crystal, some pebbles and other special objects remembering her grown-up daughters, most of whom live away; her husband's chair; the kitchen, heart of the home, where fresh muffins baked by her youngest daughter are piled steaming on a plate. Carrie was twenty, big and gentle and crazy about the horses and other animals who live with them, and would likely not leave her parents' home: a mentally disabling condition makes it difficult for her to live alone.

Fran's days had to remain quite flexible to accommodate Carrie's activities, but she also still actively "mothered" the other girls who seem reluctant to sever the close family ties to seek support elsewhere. Danielle, the stewardess, had to be picked up and brought home last weekend because she was ill; Randa, the eldest girl, started a new job last month and her parents moved her into her apartment.

Her workplace memories were mostly stories of patients, like the young girl she befriended with the amputated leg, who was so embarrassed, bewildered and disgusted by her infected half-limb. Fran's stories of early nursing showed a discipline marked by rigidity and control. The young nurses stood up whenever a doctor (always male) entered the room. The head nurse inspected their appearance fastidiously for adherence to starched rules: stocking seams ruler-straight, pristine fingernails, perfectly folded cap, in a colour announcing one's level in the hierarchy. Learning how to "do" nursing was an eminently practical venture for Fran, although to her "practical" had more to do with a developing an accurate feeling-sense for people, than with perfecting technical skills. She said "most of my decisions are intuitive . . . if it doesn't feel right or it feels right." Her daughters called her "witchy" because of Fran's propensity to utter extraordinary perceptions of what seemed hidden, or to make uncannily correct predictions.

She also stressed the importance of "empathy" in her work as a nurse, which she explained as an ability to communicate with a patient in silence if necessary, getting a "feel" for a patient's needs. She said even with "aphasic" patients, those who could not speak, she could "hear" their desires and replies, she could feel with her hands and acute visual observation what their bodies needed:

> The whole time that you're bathing a patient or you're rubbing their back, you're getting a feel for how they are, for their condition. And you're not going to find that in a machine, and that's what so many nurses now are watching. They're not even looking at the patient anymore, they're looking at the machine that's attached to the patient. We used to depend a lot on intuition. Even when we made rounds in the middle of the night...I'd stand by patients and listen to them breathe, or look at how they were positioned in bed, or how restless they were in their sleep. I think those are all sort of, they're not really intuitive, comes just from a trained mind . . . I realized once when I was with my daughter and she had surgery and I was looking after her and the person in the next bed had an appendectomy and was really uncomfortable and the nurse came in and gave her a shot and went out and the girl was still restless and really uncomfortable. And I was sitting there and I was getting really edgy. And I finally went over and fixed her pillows. And she settled, she was comfortable. And I realized that I don't know when that happens. There's an observation happening there, it's probably at such a deep level that you're associating so many bits of information that you're getting as you watch this girl that when it comes to you, you probably wouldn't be able to trace what...where it popped into -- I remember going back and thinking, "now how did I know that?" and...I had to do it, it was something I had to do, but it wasn't, again, it was a feel.

Empathy was something she learned from working with her patients, standing by and watching them. She compared the learning of nursing to the way mothering experiences teach empathy: "You've got this baby that you care so much about and it can't speak and it's crying and you have to somehow put yourself in their bodies to figure out what's going on."

Fran herself was in her early fifties when we talked, and exploring new worlds voraciously. She had started back to work nursing not too long ago, enjoying the challenge of learning about and adjusting to all the changes in the medical community, systems of health care delivery, and nursing skills since she worked as a young nurse long ago. The refresher courses she took filled such a need that she was sparked to seek more post-secondary learning experiences. She had enrolled in the adult education certificate program. She loved the dialogue in these courses, and the intellectual connections and insights she was experiencing. As she neared its completion she found the confidence to reach for a new goal: a graduate degree in nursing. Over the first year I knew her she took two graduate-level philosophy courses in an area that was "way out" for her: ecology and feminism. But she'd found a young idealistic professor who she respected as a guide to tremulous new worlds of thought, and through his gentle enthusiasm for celebrating the earth and rescuing women from their bonds in patriarchy she found herself a new "convert" to feminism. This was a significant transformation for her. She shared with me her journal, where she wrote:

> I have approached this course with some fear and trepidation because feminism has been a dirty word to my generation. As I begin to read, think, write and discuss I realize that it knocks at the very foundations of the kind of life and relationships that have supported me until now. I've returned to university at an age where most people are considering retirement. Perhaps this is an indication that I am ready and open to hear new ideas and opinions, and to seek new directions...to do this I must expose myself to these new ways of thinking.

As the course progressed, Fran had to grapple personally with two difficult issues: her Christian faith, which appeared to her now to be oppressively patriarchal and indifferently destructive to the earth; and many of her friends, the women who appeared to her now to be trapped in limiting roles, low self-esteem and distorting expectations, and the men who appeared to her now to be unacceptably chauvinistic and autocratic husbands. At the course's end she wrote:

> This course has changed me. ...it has been the agony and the ecstasy. I've never been so uncomfortable...but with support from my classmates and teacher I have waded into the murky waters of feminism and ecology and I'm going to be OK...I now consider myself a feminist with a real interest in preserving our environment.

This cognitive transformation seemed to be so significant to Fran because never before had she experienced anything like it, certainly not in any of her workplace experiences. Her hospital learning was incremental, not transformative. In her return to nursing, beginning with the refresher program she attended, Fran learned by watching others and "by doing", which for her was the preferred way of learning anything: she was happiest when she's immersed in physical activity. Fran also seemed to seek out instructor-led learning. She was successful in the nursing refresher courses, although fearful at first, because she felt encouraged and supported. The instructors had experienced the same phenomenon of returning to nursing after years at home -- they had "walked the walk", and they led Fran gently into the changes in practice, building on each small success.

Fran's process of learning the practice of nursing was a colorful patchwork of experiences from inside and outside the workplace: she herself used the metaphor of a "quilt" to describe lifelong learning. She learned about rules and control working in the hospital, about behavioral expectations from watching other nurses (she still had vivid memories of the nurses in their smart caps and dark capes that she watched when she was a little girl following her father as he made his surgeon's rounds in the hospital), and about what to do by working with patients: "listening" to their silent calls with her eyes, ears, fingers, and intuition, and watching the outcomes of her actions. But in her years away from nursing, Fran learned how to figure out what people need. At first she said she hated being at home with children out in the country and felt out of place with the other farm women, until a "hired woman" who knew country life came to live with the family. Bertha taught Fran "how to see": showed her the small beauties of the roadside wildflowers on their walks, showed her how to slow down, sniff and listen to her world, and taught her the pleasures of domestic arts. Her classroom experiences, being led by a supportive teacher through discussion and reading, took her "through a door" into radically new frames of thinking. Through instructing other nurses, Fran was herself constructing new ideas about different learning styles, about the structures of the information, and about holistic patient care.

Fran's return to nursing, to a whole new set of beliefs and practices in the medical community, was stimulating, not fearful or negative. She liked the new focus on holistic patient care, and involving "clients" in their own treatment and decision-making about their health. She liked the new responsibilities of nurses. But she wanted to branch out. She thought she'd like to facilitate support groups for women in various health issues, particularly concerns related to menopause. When I asked how and when she might begin organizing a group, she pulled back, saying she needed to learn more first, needed to finish her certificate in adult education. When I asked if she was "rationalizing" her way out of a goal, deliberately avoiding it, she laughed readily and admitted "Oh probably." She said once, "You're asking me so much about nursing -- that's not me anymore, that's not where I'm at." She was just then beginning a new graduate course in "phenomenology" that excited her. I realized that for now, Fran wanted to explore and discover -- to open new questions and follow the chase.

Elana: Learning to stretch the job to let her grow

Elana struck me from the first as smooth and extremely capable. She is the sort of person who will think to copy an article that crosses her desk that she believes might be of interest for this student or that instructor, and then she remembers to bring it with her. During our class I watched from the sidelines as Elana worked with a small group of colleagues to research evaluation methods for "soft skills" training. When the group's communication suffered a small breakdown, Elana convened a meeting at her home to sort things out using a systemic problem-solving method (an intervention which apparently dissolved the group's hostility and restored fruitful and creative group dynamics). In their presentation to an audience, certain members of the group narrated in rather emotional terms this story of the group's marvelous recovery and the astonishing learning process they had experienced. Elana waited her turn, then quietly and simply presented the data of the group's original research. Her manner, like the documents she produced, bore the calm control of a thoroughly professional manager. Even when our conversations led her into painful memories or intimately personal revelations, her voice was carefully modulated. She was punctual and punctilious in her work: she gave an air of being consciously correct in her behavior. She tolerated the excesses or blunders of those around her, but asserted herself firmly.

Elana's stories of learning in the workplace were characterized by her drive and what appeared to be first her extraordinary initiative and drive, second her patience in tolerating and her attitude of always trying to learn from the unpredictable and illogical organizational behavior surrounding her, and third her courage and willingness to jump into unknown waters, however murky.

At the time of our conversations she was a "senior professional" working as an adjunct to the human resources unit of a provincial government department. Elana worked directly with senior branch managers and the department's directors, mediating between them and the human resources department where appropriate, to help them design learning opportunities for their people. She seemed to be her own one-woman business within the organization, which was the way she seemed to enjoy working most. She disliked very much the repetitive form-filling regulation-governed work of the human resources department. She seemed to thrive on the flexibility of her current position, and the creative scope of the work.

Much of her work here began with research, something she truly enjoyed doing although she chastised herself for being too divergent: reading too many books, going too far astray into the resources without being more selective and shutting down and pulling in the search process before she was flooded with information that had to be painstakingly distilled. She said, "I can move from one idea to another without accomplishing anything, just accomplishing things on the surface," so she learned to ground her information searches in a particular practical focus: a project that needed doing, or an outcome that would be measured. Above all Elana seemed to enjoy exposure to new information. She read constantly (referring to the leadership and organizational behavior books she reads at night as "my compass"), and had taken night courses since she began working after high school. In the course I taught, I was struck by her attentiveness to what was going on, participating with almost enthusiastic cooperation in all discussions and activities. Frequently she murmured little exclamations of delight when others spoke ("Hmmm!", she would nod).

The first of the three key characteristics in Elana's work history and learning that I have chosen to discuss, is her drive or initiative. She described herself as an "innovator" in an organization, always dreaming up new projects and finding ways to make them go. Elana could see clearly a vision for the future and was frustrated sometimes beyond control by critics pouncing on what to her were the mundane details. The restless seeking that was her initiative was also apparent in the way she had pushed herself through various jobs and training to be able to do what she was doing at this organizational level, after starting worklife as a secretary. She saw herself as having made "radical changes", moving from administrative work to the university (where she took a B.A.) to civic planning and finally to human resources. Her career history was marked by a series of jobs, each of which she described as being a "box". She treated the "walls" of her jobs like elastic, showing me with her hands how she pushed against the sides of the "box". She stretched the range of tasks, experimented with new approaches, and pushed at the edges of the boundaries defining her responsibilities and authority. One job, which involved interviewing, became repetitive after awhile, so she searched out and experimented with new approaches to interviewing. In another job in human resources, in which she said the "daily grind can drive you mad" she began reading about employee career management, then sketched out some ideas for a program . Her biggest difficulty, as was often the case in her work, was "selling" her ideas to the people around her, persuading supervisors of her new capability to assume new responsibility.

The motive for her drive to keep pushing, keep stretching, seemed to be her restlessness and hunger for new challenge. She said, "I like to do something once, do it a second time to improve it, because you always need to improve something . . . then it's time to let it go." She selected areas for study with the same exploratory sense, taking a course or formal education program in a particular topic area that could add a new dimension to her work. She studied adult education for a short while because she could see the potential of a learning focus in her work of organizational development. But she said she was "a bit embarrassed" to admit that adult education was not something that overly intrigued her. She was now more interested in competencies and measurement, and so she had decided to move into a study of this area. The point is Elana wanted to keep moving in her learning. What drove her craziest was organizations or people who tried to make her sit still, confined and controllable within a single job definition and identity, when she needed to be constantly moving.

The second characteristic I have chosen to discuss is Elana's patience in tolerating unpleasant tasks, conditions, and people, and always finding ways to learn from them. She had the ability to extricate herself from personal emotional engagement and enter an analytical viewpoint that was almost clinical. From this view of detached curiosity -- "I'm a stranger in a strange land" she said once -- she could visualize the big picture and laugh at what happens. Elana's way of seeing was to constantly construct patterns, viewing events and people from a perspective of critical distance. This was evident not only in the way she readily described her own work history (as a series of boxes that she stretched, then jumped from), but in her view of others and how they interacted. She seemed to analyse people and their behavior like a clinician, her mind gnawing away at the perplexity of what made them tick until she figured out how to communicate with them. One example was the "bean counters," those detail-oriented folks in an organization whose motives and perspectives she was struggling to understand so she could get them to see her project visions. Another was loud aggressive people. She was puzzled but not unduly frustrated about how to deal with some people. She saw herself as being part of the problem: "we share the problem." Her focus was finding a communicative strategy that worked. Listening was key, she claimed: listening to and caring about their issues, valuing their perspective, finding out their motives.

Perhaps the most compelling example of Elana's patience and analytic way of learning from unpleasant organizational situations was her strategies for surviving in her current position. She described the current workplace situation raining around her ears as "world war three" , as "a bit like standing at the Mad Hatter Tea Party and watching them scramble and run around and change their minds." Like other areas of Alberta's provincial government in the 1993-6 period shocked by the fallout of Premier Klein's emphasis on "reinvention", her department was struggling to cope with waves of radical policy changes, stern accountability measures and massive cuts in personnel. Elana found herself at first being affected emotionally by the chaos, realizing that the organizational changes were often ridiculous, that no one seemed to be "in control", and that the senior people around her were acting in "very disappointing" ways: fighting over territory, hoarding projects, lashing out at one another. But, she said, she soon got her "perspective" back. With her customary clinical pragmatism, she analysed the circumstances and her own responses to them. She saw the fear and desperation causing the behaviors. She tried to explain for herself what was happening in terms of the organization's stages of growth. She began to see the humor of some of the outrageous maneuvers and ransackings plotted by the more determined opportunists pillaging this war-torn organization. Most important, she was able to ask the classic optimist's question, what can I learn from all this? what's in this for me? At that point her creative pulse began to throb, and she began to distinguish more clearly ways of developing projects and services to meet the needs of the people and the organization. This was the impetus that kept her head above the despondency that had affected so many around her.

Elana was clear about the fact that her own career direction was never determined by nor dependent upon the organization. She said she enjoyed reading books like Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Effective People* and William Bridges' *Managing*

Change, and thought in terms of where she'd like to be in five years, ten years, twenty. "I see a strong woman of 70 beckoning to me." Her decisions affecting her career changes and her actions in each job were determined by what interesting or novel things she thought she would learn about from each, not by loyalty to the organization's direction, which she said she doesn't care about, nor by ambitions for power, territory, or status within the organization. (Although she said she looked back over her career and wondered whether she shouldn't be "higher" on the organizational ladder.)

The third of Elana's workplace characteristics that struck me were her courage and willingness to risk. A big part of her work in recent years had been to create projects and programs that will bring about her innovative ideas, even when her job description didn't necessarily invite such activity, and sell these ideas to what is often a resistant organization. Although she was not comfortable giving presentations and certainly not in giving workshops, she forced herself to do so even when she expects a chilly reception from people. About any unpleasant or anxiety-producing workplace situation, Elana seemed simply to steel herself to do it; like the days during the "re-structuring wars", when she muttered to herself every morning as she walked up the hill to her office, "This is good for me, this is good for me, this is...." She was self-reliant and therefore doesn't depend on other's approval: at one session that wasn't going too well, she stopped everyone part way through and invited them to write an "honest" expression of how things were going. She then analysed the negative feedback in terms of what it indicated about participants' readiness, about organizational conditions that prompted their resistance, and finally about changes that could be made to the program and to her instructional methods.

Knowing that many people would not attempt to give workshops or presentations because of debilitating fear about being so vulnerable, I asked Elana if she had ever experienced fear. "Oh yes," she said. She explained she always feared "not being good enough", and attributes the germination of this self-doubt as being "part of growing up in an Irish family." However, she also had learned the consequences, in undermined self-confidence and limits to personal freedom, of avoiding something because of fear. Her example was when she realized she did not want to be a secretary all her life, but found a fearful part of herself struggling against her urge to quit her well-paying, secure job and enter the frightening unknown of a B.A. program (which she eventually completed). As she hung on to the job, she found herself slipping into what she calls "one of my bad states." These happened at different periods of Elana's work history when she was not challenged enough, or felt "boxed in" and trapped by a limiting job. She said she got "very lazy", lost interest in learning and energy for doing anything at home or at work, became almost "vegetative". Her fear of falling into this "bad state" was evidently worse than her fear of anything a work challenge might present. Elana also hinted that she was afraid of becoming dependent, as she felt her mother did. She became almost passionate on this point, in Elana's own controlled, smooth way. She told of her horror at watching her mother try to enter the workforce at fifty-plus after years at home raising a family: un-skilled, un-experienced, and un-valued -- eking out an existence on a clerk's paycheck.

Elana said fear is a great motivator, but "you must recognize and control it or fear will freeze your thinking patterns so that you can't see the alternatives. That's when you lose confidence and become vulnerable -- when you let fear take over." Her one goal was to be "strong". She had also developed strategies over the years to identify and control her fear, and said she was getting better at this. I detected a note of her compulsion for steely self-resolve not to let fear "take over" in Elana's current inner conflict over whether to leave her job or stay. She seemed to be trying to figure out her own motives, and above all to avoid acting out of fear; she didn't want to quit as a coward's way of ending pain, nor stay as a coward's way of avoiding anything new and unfamiliar. But despite her refusal to let fear stop her from doing anything, Elana relied on her distinct sense of general boundaries to mark what she would and wouldn't';t do, what she was and wasn't able to do well. When she sought a new job or new project, she looked for "fit" between herself and the feel of the new challenge. She learned from her six months in city planning, a job that didn't "feel" right from the start, that when there's a "bad fit" between her natural capabilities and interests and the requirements of the job, she was "setting myself up for failure." The result can be misery.

> Right now I'm wondering what I'm going to be doing in the future. I see myself as working, somehow, probably until I'm 70. But not for this organization. Not for an organization I don't think. So I'm trying to figure out what my next move will be. And so I'm searching my mind in terms of what skills and abilities and competencies do I have now that I need to develop further for this next step that I see coming three years from now. And if it, and I'll make it happen, because I introduce change in my life. I've always introduced change in my life...One of the things that keeps me going is, I try to visualize what I'm going to be like at 70 and 75. It has nothing to do with money, but it has a lot to do with what I've contributed to society, who I am as a human being. It's this picture of who I am. And that's sort of a driving force that keeps me grounded in terms of not going completely crazy here. Because it would be easy to go crazy here.
>
> This picture . . . it's of a strong, healthy woman, a woman who knows what's going on in the world, who's participating in what's going on in the world, who's developed other skills and interests, who is very much alert and alive. So I can't give up now if that's who I want to be then. I look for those who are involved in similar situations to see what they are doing. And I haven't found many of them, unfortunately. And that's scary.

Liz: Learning to integrate spirit, passion, home, and work in a journey to find self

Liz asked me to come to visit her at the company where she had worked continuously all of her adult years, a large chemical plant which occupied several acres of land outside the city. I got lost getting out there, cursing the ice fog I crawled through for almost an hour, but yet I was looking forward to our talk because Liz was an infectiously and energetically happy person. Vivacious and usually smiling, she was impeccably dressed as always in bright clothes, today in a red suit with swirling black trim. She moved with elegant poise, and frequently tossed waves of red hair when she laughed. Liz told me later, "I need passion in my life, and my clothes are one way of putting some passion into my workday."

Liz met me at the security office, and after the appropriate clearance forms had been filled in, she took me for a short tour of the plant. Evidently proud of her company and considering herself fully immersed in it as a loyal member, Liz told me the story of its founder, showed me the framed mission statement, walked me past aerial photographs illustrating the company's dramatic growth displayed in state along the walls. The whole opening portion of the interview was "we" talk: "We are restructuring now so that every department is self-sufficient. . . "; "We have a philosophy of excellence here . . . " She took me into the cafeteria where we talked for some time, interrupted by several people who stopped to chat, share a joke or greeting. One man got out of hospital after heart surgery and elected to come back to work within two weeks rather than to recuperate at home -- "It's more fun to come to work. The people here are very positive, very 'up'." Another man car-pooled with Liz to a university course last winter -- "We organized a group that got together for dinner and then went to the course. That makes it fun for everyone." I learned that Liz knew and cared about many of the people who worked in this company as if they were family.

> I guess what I find about myself is that I like change and I like variety. And if I do the same thing too long, I get bored. So I, I think probably one way of putting it is, I like to be challenged. So challenge kind of drives me to move on. And what I found was that, okay, I had been in the engineering and construction services department for approximately ten years. And I had taken…three promotions…So it's important for me to keep growing and keep learning. So as I conquer one challenge, I need to be on with the next one. And as soon as that one becomes routine, I'm out looking, right? So what happened was I thought "okay. Things are too comfortable, too routine. I need something different because I get bored." And then I, I sort of, I guess I work better under pressure. I need to be pushed and then I'll perform.

Liz indicated she felt fortunate to be "with" her company: "They've been good to me." Specifically, since she started here working as a secretary more than twenty years ago, she had been encouraged to apply for jobs of increasing supervisory responsibility and given what she considered the appropriate training needed to succeed in these jobs. (For example, in her current position as "Training Coordinator", the company sent her on a five-day Train-the-Trainer program, a three-day Instructional Design course, and a three-day Interpersonal Skills Program.)

Were these courses immediately helpful in doing her work? Liz pointed out two important ways in which the courses were valuable: first, they gave her confidence. "This isn't difficult. I can do that!," she thought to herself. Second, the courses gave her a language and structured processes for doing things. When she started the training job, she was able to break down what at first seemed like an overwhelmingly amorphous and tangled set of tasks into clear steps. She could then look at each step and systematically decide what to do. Some tasks, like planning this training manual or coordinating staff, appeared similar to tasks she's done before in other positions: Liz was able to compare them and use the task structures she'd already internalized as the starting point for figuring out how to do the new tasks. Other tasks she didn't know how to do, so Liz found ways to figure out how to do them. (Chiefly, she asked lots of questions, and found out what people did previously). But there were certain tasks she set aside and delegated, like one "great opportunity" to lead a communications course when the instructor dropped out at the last moment: "I will not set myself up for failure. I need to feel comfortable to be able to do something, and there was no window of time to learn it so I could do it well."

Liz's office was in a different part of the plant than in the cafeteria, and she drove me there. When we entered I noticed the pictures of children on her desk. Picking up one photograph and holding it, she told me the boy in the picture was killed in an accident fifteen years ago. "Somehow you get over it," Liz murmured, replacing the picture on her desk. Work helped a lot, apparently. The other boy was married, and Liz was radiant as she told about the fun of grandmotherhood. (Liz used the word "fun" a great deal, and told me once that she sought and usually found or created a lot of fun in her life.) She was especially intrigued observing the little boy learn by watching and imitating others.

She explained that "when you're raising your own kids you don't have time to enjoy all these things." She raised her boys alone after leaving an alcoholic husband, she told me. In one part of our conversation she dwelt on this part of her life: she described herself as struggling "to put food on the table", sour-tempered and bitter, sometimes losing patience with the kids, and not liking herself very much. Yet at work, "I'd come with a smile on my face." Her life was "totally split".

This portrait was hard for me to imagine, given the enthusiastic radiance of the woman before me. I tried delicately to inquire what happened, how she changed. Liz was clear on this point: her job was what helped her grow. She explained: As she was given increasing responsibility (and most importantly, the support she needed to handle the responsibility successfully), she developed more skills in organizing, problem-solving, naming and coping with dilemmas, and communicating. As she saw herself using these skills in action she became more confident in herself. She took her confidence home and found more effective ways to handle her financial issues, her parenting dilemmas, and her personal needs. As she watched herself manage tough problems successfully, Liz said she began to believe in herself more, at home and at work. "It's a spiral effect," she said. "When you learn things, you feel good. You take that home with you. When you feel good, you perform better. They recognize that, I get more money, I get a promotion. So then they teach me more things. I'm capable, I'm rolling." She believed that her overall pattern of growth had been an integration of "my home self and my work self. The two selves are like two spheres that gradually came together over the years".

Liz described one critical incident to show her workplace learning was representative of many of the stories she told. She and two colleagues were working to design and implement a program, under "impossible" timelines, with "impossibly limited" resources. But they finished the job. Liz remembered the celebration: "We just hugged each other and said, We DID IT!" I found the story curious. It seemed to document team synergy, or a work project well done, more than learning. What did she learn? "You learn that you can do it," she said. "You learn to trust yourself," and "I can learn whatever I need to learn . . . As long as I want it, as long as I am willing to get out of my way and don't give myself negative thoughts, I can have it." This story of "learning" centered on a work project that challenged and demonstrated to people what they could do well was not un-typical among the women in this study. I believe it illustrates that much learning is only noticeable in performance of competency. The learning process itself, what people assume to be a long, complex, recursive process, either unfolds in ways they are not aware of, or happens through incidents and struggles that they do not think to name as "learning" incidents.

The other sort of story Liz told shows how much of her workplace learning had evolved through interpersonal relations and communication. For instance when she took on her first supervisory role, one of her earliest learnings was how different people understand things in different ways. Liz found this to be constantly surprising, that people actually didn't perceive what she saw clearly, or didn't hear what she thought she'd said. To make the unit work, she had to learn to watch and listen closely, constantly checking communication. At the moment, Liz said she still was working most on her listening skills, trying to understand what people mean.

Liz did not ever speak critically to me about her organization. Her workplace learning pattern seemed generally one of grounding herself and spiraling outwards, expanding her knowledge of how things work, how to do this job, and how to meet people's needs, but always folding the knowledge back in to herself. She was self-critical -- a professed "perfectionist" -- and listened closely to feedback from others to help her do better those things that she believed were important to be successful in her job. But

Liz was completely loyal to her organization. In our conversations she didn't ever stand back from the organization and critically question why something happened. I get the impression it would never occur to her to do so, even when she found a large gap between espoused and actual practice. For instance, Liz told stories of doing needs assessments that involved lots of conversation going back and forth again and again between people and supervisors, trying to get "clarity" about "what's really happening here" and "what's needed". It was a very messy and unpredictable process, constantly redirected by people changing their minds, or by finding out that what she assumed to be the case wasn't, or finding out that what people said they could do was different from her own perception of what they could do.

Yet her company continued to uphold in principle a neat-and-tidy standardized needs assessment approach. Liz simply muttered offhandedly, "Those things never work," and she wasted no further time questioning the company's policy. She continued to do needs assessments by working intuitively from one step of the process to the next, figuring it out as she went by observing carefully the consequences of her own actions, sniffing out hints of people's feelings.

Liz's focus was always to cut to the core: find out what really needed doing, then figure out the best way to do it. She relied on what seems to be a keen intuitive sense to monitor what was happening as she goes. (For example, I was struck by one story where Liz said she "just sensed" in a long distance phone call that despite lengthy negotiations, the Calgary office had a different picture than she of the documentation training she was coordinating for their people. She stopped the entire process at that point to go back and redefine objectives and needs, clarify each other's meanings, and compare beliefs about how best to accomplish the task.)

Lately Liz said her learnings have focused on the "spiritual" side of herself. People at work were attracted to her, and had told her she had "that extra sparkle". I recognized this to be true, and explain this sparkle as a sort of centered energy and warmth, as well as an excited "Let's do it" attitude.

> Even if somebody has a problem [with me], it is their problem, not mine. It's only mine if I choose…But if I listen to the problem and get clarity around it then probably we can solve it. But I, I've come to, and this is sort of a different side of my learning, and I don't know where you'll come from with this, but I'll share it with you anyway, I have another side of my learning and that's the spiritual side. And that, my spiritual side helps me to grow, to be a better person and to not make judgments and be accepting and caring and kind. And that spiritual side I feel helps me on the business side. Because if I always understand and can accept where people are coming from, and I understand that I make no judgments about other people [that's when my spiritual side kicks in] then when I marry them together, I think those kind of skills help me.

She believed this personal quality to be one reason she was so successful in her job: people trusted her, would tell her what they really think, and would listen to what she said. She attributed her development of this quality to a few intersecting events. First, her partner persuaded her to take a five day course called "Pursuit of Excellence" (the company paid for it), an exuberant experience which Liz credits with changing her attitudes about her life. Second, her career had continued spiralling upwards, comfortably yet always enticing her with new challenges and opportunities to express and thus discover her abilities. Third, Liz more and more was valuing and setting aside "blank time", think time. She found her current job, emphasizing "proactivity", more enriching than her former positions of "pressure and reacting -- always forced to make decisions on the spot." More and more, she explained, she luxuriated in the time she made for reflection, which Liz called her "awakenings".

Marilyn: Learning to be still and wait to find the way to an authentic self

I'd known Marilyn for almost three years at the time of writing, and at the conclusion of this study we still got together to chat about books, to get each other's opinion about a contract, to share stories about contract work -- both the exciting rewards and the inevitable dark struggles. I first met Marilyn in a class I led. She was the sort of person everyone would remember after the first session. Outspoken, opinionated, and assured, Marilyn also had a witty gentleness that puts all at ease. All, that is, except those who are intimidated by her assertive approach or those who try to compete with her for control of a conversation. Three other characteristics I found noteworthy: her work in very different jobs while raising a family by herself in northern Alberta, in Saudi Arabia, and on Parliament Hill in Ottawa; her journal writing, which was abundant and rich with reflections connecting and questioning all of her experiences; and her frequent explicit expressions of her Catholic faith (When I entered Marilyn's home, the first thing I saw was an elegant large framed print. Centered in the print are the words "I AM", and inscribed all over and around these words are scriptural descriptions of Christ: Mighty warrior, Prince of Peace, Son of Man, the Word.)

When she was twenty-one, Marilyn found herself married and raising two children. She enjoyed being at home with her children: in fact, she attributes her lifelong devotion to play as being an integral part of learning and life which emanated from her years playing with her children, singing and crafting with them, coaching other children's sports, and leading children's clubs such as Scouts. But she quickly developed a distaste for what appeared to be the fringe role expectations of mothers-at-home: daily coffee klatches bored her, and she longed to get involved in the community. When she volunteered to be part of the local recreation board she was the only woman. She sized up the others to be, besides male and much older, entrenched in particular ways of thinking and lacking imagination.

The critical incident in her learning at this point that Marilyn narrated was "the swimming pool issue": the board wanted to build a pool in response to community demand. What angered her was that nobody stopped to ask: What are the consequences of building a pool? What have other communities with the same issue done? Why build? What's the real need? Naturally she was challenged by the board to answer the questions she alone was asking. So Marilyn set about, in what became apparent over her career history as her accustomed way to approach an issue, to gather information. She phoned other community recreation representatives, talked to government consultants in community development, gathered statistics about costs and maintenance, and presented it all to the board. Her conclusion: a pool was a financially crippling proposition for a small community. If we want our kids to swim, let's team up with another community. Despite the board's objections, particularly from members who were driven by the community's age-old dream to "own" a pool, Marilyn dug around to find a bus, and set up a schedule that was to this day successfully shuttling the community's children back and forth to another pool. Yet, said Marilyn with a wink, even today there's a chart on the office wall showing donations to date for building the pool.

She said of herself that these days, in her mid-forties, she was much more "process-oriented". Her task-oriented approach in her early working days certainly got things done that Marilyn thought answered a community's most significant needs, but won her hostility as well as respect. Through her volunteer involvement with the community Marilyn learned so much about community development and recreation that later in her life she was appointed Recreation Director of a northern Albertan resort town. The responsibilities were stressful, balancing facility maintenance and recreation programming with the sorts of proactive measures for change that Marilyn wanted to introduce. She was always asking, Can we achieve more than we are? Is this the best way to do this? What are we really trying to do here? "Critical reflection had always been inherent in me" she said. "I've always questioned the rules, the way things are."

Both her achievements during her time managing all recreation responsibilities in this town, and her impressive abilities to communicate with a wide variety of people, forging collaborative connections and cooperative projects, brought her to the attention of the MP for the area. When he was sent to Ottawa to assume a particular portfolio as Minister, he asked Marilyn to be his Policy Advisor. Her next years, raising one son, working "70 to 80 hours a week", flying across the country every ten days, and "juggling approximately a thousand balls", were a whirlwind. In my various conversations with Marilyn about these years I've heard her describe them variously as "horrible", "exciting", and "completely draining". She had talked both of her deep admiration for the commitment and brilliance of federal politicians (the Charlottetown accord was a key issue during her tenure in Ottawa), and her disappointment and even disgust with the artificiality of "these people."

Her workplace learning approaches were vividly evident in her stories from these experiences, both as Recreation Director and as a politician's EA in Ottawa. Marilyn learned primarily by tackling a project and figuring out how to do it. The impetus for a project typically was one of her own questions, which she began asking the moment she was introduced to a new environment: Why are things the way they are? Her workplace role was typically that of leader, which perhaps explained why she doesn't mention workplace role models such as supervisors who have influenced her development. She read constantly. Marilyn always seemed to have at least four or five books on the go. All her life she had enrolled continuously in various courses At the same time as she was completing her certificate program in adult and continuing education, she was also working on a public management certificate, digesting municipal by-laws. Her most significant learning happened, she said, through doing: trying things out, figuring things out, gathering information and scanning it to create a proposed solution. She said, "I meander through learning opportunities and say, 'Yes I need that', 'No, I don't need that'. I have an eight-track mind. Usually all eight tracks are playing at the same time. I have to force myself to say, listen, listen, listen."

But most significantly in her workplace learning, I believe, was Marilyn's predilection for deep and sustained reflection on her experiences. In one particular cross-cultural critical incident where she planned to facilitate a highly structured round-table discussion involving white and aboriginal leaders from government and industry, she was profoundly affected by the turn of events that caused her to throw out her plans and keep the participants in a circle sharing personal stories all morning:

> I had gone in to the roundtables with my agenda, my white western agenda -- results-oriented success. This year I asked an aboriginal woman to facilitate. The elder began with a prayer, then the woman talked, and talked -- for fifteen minutes! -- about her life story. You know, the highlights would've been fine, but we got the whole thing. Then she lit sweetgrass --in the middle of this corporate office, sweetgrass! -- and then blessed the talking stick, it was a beautifully decorated talking stick, and

> she talked of listening, and of the patience to really listen to each other. And my partner Barney is going crazy -- you've got to stop her! She'll set off the smoke alarms! We've got people catching planes in four hours, we've got to put them in their small groups, NOW. And I said, no, Barney, we can't stop this thing, don't you see what's happening? And she set up such a chain of trust that people began to share, and they took the talking stick and shared things, very personal things. When the vice-president of [a major bank] took the stick, he said, Mark this day, this is a special day. And about a third of the way through I began to relax, and I realized that this was so much more powerful than anything we could have dreamed, I knew I was learning something very important.

She said that the more she heard herself talking through the incidents of that morning with the various people who called to remark on the transformative power of the session, the more she was coming to understand what she learned that day about policy, people, and her self. I came to know more of her reflectivity through her remarkably insightful journal reflections on her career history. Throughout our conversations, many of which unfolded during and after particular work projects she was currently engaged in, I came to appreciate Marilyn's ways of reflecting constantly about her work. Always she was asking questions like, What was happening here? What do my inner voices tell me? What was new or unfamiliar for me? What does this mean? How can I apply what I've learned?

Sixteen years ago Marilyn and her two sons accompanied her then-husband to Saudi Arabia in a cross-cultural learning experience that she later wrote about as "life-altering", "a mystical journey", a complete upending of her own beliefs and way of life. What she described as the squalor, injustices and anger of the indigenous people surrounding her compelled her confrontation of the practices of her Western culture. Her time and reflections in the physical austerity of the desert, a place of "surreal beauty" and "personal insignificance" led her to search the corners of her Catholic faith. She began to ask new questions for herself, about meaning, the Creator, and caring for creation. She wrote that she learned humility, she learned to "search deep within myself" for answers, and she learned the value above all of relationships with people. Gradually, Marilyn said, she found ways in which she could "contribute", sharing her life, home, and gifts with the people -- a "veritable United Nations" -- that she met.

Marilyn had never taken a university degree, and this was one area of her background that she felt somewhat insecure about. She was quite confident in her identity as a "professional", and said that usually her expertise and work experience carried more weight in the workworld than a university degree. But in her journal she wrote:

> I have many friends who work as professionals without degrees. We all have hangups about it. We all feel not quite good enough because of it. We all work extra hard to prove that we can do it. And yet we all believe that we possess an "embarrassment of riches" because of the experiences we have had. The question is, "How do those experiences help us to know the things we needed to know?" And, "How was this learning different from going to school for six or eight years?

At one point in our talks she was exploring the possibility of entering an undergraduate program, but wondered whether the learning rewards of the experience would be worth the sacrifices -- financially, personally, vocationally, and psychologically.

She wrote, "I DON'T WANT TO TRAIN PEOPLE. I want to work with people to unharness their vision, to channel their resources, to empower. My goal in life was to be of service." She constantly referred to the changes swirling around us, reading as much as she could about what was happening, and asking, "How do we embrace and facilitate change from within our situations? What do we learn from Gorbachev, Mandela, Bob Rae, and Joe Clark?" (all men whom Marilyn admired for various reasons.)

When we last spoke Marilyn was working as a consultant, selecting contracts (mostly in facilitating community agencies to form a vision or an action plan for development) that appeared to be consonant with her philosophies of growth from within, finding and using the resources at hand. She had experienced no small turmoil in turning down or withdrawing from contracts, even lucrative ones, that required her to function in value frames or to use fragmented rational-linear approaches that she no longer can stomach. She welcomed contracts that appeared to lead to interesting new learning opportunities, that is, opportunities in directions that extended her own search for civility, thriving community, and mutual stewardship. Recently her experiences in facilitating groups turned her reflections in directions of gender issues, and for the first time in her life she found herself regretting her past subordination to masculine expectations in the workplace. She said she began to assert her feminism more. She continued to take courses, attend retreats, and spend much time in meditation ("for the first time in my life, I have the chance to ask, who was Marilyn? what was her purpose?"). During the research conversations she was feeling under-worked and somewhat impatient. But overall Marilyn was convinced that God had a plan for her, and that she had to wait, not push, for it to unfold. She likened her current state to "being pregnant": there was a contented fullness that grows to a point where one thinks one will burst with impatience, but one must be still and wait. While she waited, she continued to seek the kinds of work that affirmed and extended her sense of the "authentic" inner being that she had come to appreciate as her special self.

Kirsten: Learning to live with the limits and find the right balance

As Kirsten said, when she first graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce degree, she would not have imagined the career path unfolding in her life. She had not stayed in any job longer than a few years, mostly due to organizational circumstances that dissolved or shuffled her position. In reflection she found that she was so used to change in the workplace that after a year and a half or so in any particular job, she began itching for something new. I was struck throughout Kirsten's workplace stories by the theme of "constraint", something she didn't name or dwell upon herself -- Kirsten was far from being a "poor me" sort of person -- but nevertheless she seemed to have spent much effort finding ways to survive and even thrive in organizations whose bureaucracy strangled initiative and creativity of any kind.

But Kirsten was one of those eternally cheerful people that seemed insouciantly peaceful no matter how perplexing the events that befell her. When I met her in an Adult Learning and Development course, I found myself immediately attracted by her earnest enthusiasm for learning. Any project, assignment, even question raised seemed to offer Kirsten a springboard from which to dive into a chase after information. Disappointments and obstacles, even major ones, didn't discourage her. She began work as a salesperson for a gourmet food company, and said she learned in her year-and-a-bit that direct marketing was not her forte. How did she figure this out? By comparing herself to others, she said. She watched her colleagues carefully in every job she had held. In sales, she decided that the really good ones had a concrete sense of "closing the deal"; they could think fast, listening to and intuiting the customer's unstated wishes while thinking quickly on their feet to negotiate an offer that would be accepted. Watching herself in contrast, Kirsten realized that whereas customers often responded warmly to the fact that she liked taking care of people, giving them service and information, that she wouldn't go too far in sales because she didn't particularly like to "wheel and deal".

When the company downsized, she was "cut". She explained that the only reason she was "in shock for a bit" was because it was the first time she had been laid off. She hadn't yet experienced the sudden abruptness that embarrassed managers tend to adopt to get such unpleasantness over with: "He came in on a Thursday afternoon at 3:00 and said, I'll give you a few minutes to pack your things, and just leave the keys to the van and your office on my desk'. And that was it. He wasn't a jerk or anything, but it was just, bang." After a few more experiences with sudden organizational change (in one government department, Kirsten was off sick for a day and returned to find the whole department "had just kind of been blown up" in an unannounced re-structuring venture; her own job no longer existed), she now had learned strategies to deal with leaving. She said that a few months before she can "feel" that a job will be soon ending or a series of cuts coming, she just begins to "wind things down". She brings projects and work relationships to closure, and found herself gradually "pulling out" her personal energy and identity from the job.

She had also learned strategies for entering a new job. Watching people and finding the fit for herself was Kirsten's way of becoming part of a workplace organization. She said she had worked in enough places now that she could see behaviors immediately that for her, signaled "ways things are done around here", or "how people are allowed to be" with this or that person. She never indicated in her descriptions of organizational life her wish to question or critique what she saw around her; she didn't want to change the existing order but to help create and maintain its harmonious balance.

This intention appeared to have guided the kinds of learning she had drawn from the various workplace experiences she narrated as critical incidents. When she found a job in administration of human resources, she discovered that she enjoyed "putting things in order", and that she had a knack for organizing both project details and other people. She told about working to mediate between two colleagues who had difficulty seeing each other's perspective. Janet was a quiet, detail-oriented critical thinker, always finding the "worst case scenario". Andy was out-going, with an "amazing network", always gung-ho about a new "big picture" vision, but "a little slack on the work ethic." Kirsten found herself studying the two, and explaining each to the other. She also found herself searching for ways that she could work with each one by complementing and balancing what the other did well. Janet, said Kirsten, helped her to "see beyond" what's given, and to think of questions to raise; Kirsten in turn found herself swaying towards being the "big picture" person with Janet, helping her to move away from the columns of details to see the whole. "I sort of intuitively go to where the hole is," said Kirsten. Because balance was so important to her, she focused in her workplace learning on figuring out how to create that balance.

Kirsten also found she had to watch people carefully to find out the boundaries of her own little cell of the organizational web. Always eager to strike out and follow her imagination with a new idea, Kirsten once took the initiative to mail out a department newsletter to interested people in the organization who happened not to be on the mailing list. She was "gone up one side and down the other" by a supervisor who couldn't believe Kirsten had done it without her authorization. But Kirsten's lesson was to "keep my nose clean" and follow the rules to avoid grief; in a bureaucracy this meant, of course, using standardized procedures of hierarchical information flows and permission-granting.

At one point, Kirsten's description of work in large organizations carried a delicate flavor of resigned disillusionment, even futility, despite her cheerful tone. In her current job with the government service agency she had been part of a project team asked to design a performance management plan for the organization. After two months of interviews with various employees about their work and their needs, then brainstorming and researching and refining, the team created a three-pronged initiative with detailed program recommendations that Kirsten felt was "very thorough and innovative," emphasizing coaching, assessment, and on-going continuous performance improvement. But the project now was being shelved indefinitely, for reasons that were not clear to Kirsten. "For several months we never got a firm yes or no . . . from them. . . obviously by their silence we knew it was no." 'They' were the vice president and upper management, while 'we' are the human resources department. The undesirable polarizing of these positions, cutting off meaningful talk to understand one another as humans, was not Kirsten's focus. She appeared to see clearly and accept as inevitable the stilted relationships and insularity, the jostling among hierarchies and the sometimes outrageously subversive competition for resources. What interested me here was that despite all the rich interpersonal knowledge Kirsten demonstrated that she had learned in her own intimate work relationships about talking through issues with people, getting past the organizational barriers to find out how people feel in order to create the "balance" she so desired, she did not necessarily want to apply this knowledge to fight procedure or change the organization. What Kirsten said she learned from the process was "to cover your self and watch your back."

Projects to which she had devoted her creative passion being abruptly ended by the organization was not a novel experience for Kirsten. In a different organization (a provincial department related to forestry services) she had chaired a project -- something she had been quite excited about -- that was terminated just before implementation. "I've really learned over the last year that it doesn't matter where you are these days in larger organizations . . . nothing ever changes. You have these great plans to roll things out and -- things just never get off the ground." She had learned that to fit in with the way large organizations work, one had to go very slowly with creative projects, taking cautious steps that are each meticulously checked out with the right people. In other words, the bureaucracy had succeeded in convincing her to succumb to its own crippling procedures. The personal side of this was fascinating: Kirsten said, "you have to find a balance between realizing that you've got contributions to make to the organization . . . and at the same time to not think the initiatives you're working on are that important." In other words, to survive personally in a work environment where so little human effort was actually allowed to materialize into something concrete, and where she was in danger of beginning to think her labors were "totally futile," she had to protect the self by withdrawing creative commitment. However, she had to be careful only to withdraw enough to protect the self -- if she withdrew too much she risked losing the motivational energy she needed in the workplace to do anything at all.

At 35 years old, Kirsten was still relatively young in her work life. Her current job tenure was extremely uncertain but she's not worried. She had been in this place before, waiting for the bad news, gradually and gently withdrawing herself from the place, its purpose and its people, then eventually finding a new work home after a few months searching. Her sense of work learning just now seemed focused on the organizational cultures: she was getting faster at learning which subtle norms were significant, where the "middle line" was that must be walked, and whose changing expectations one needed to attend to, so she could "fit" herself into relationships and the flow of work in a way that created a harmonious "balance." She didn't acknowledge or appear to recognize the limitations placed on her creativity, her yearn to learn, and her bubbling initiatives to act by various workplace constraints. At this point in her work life, her focus was upon understanding exactly what these constraints were, and making meaningful sense of them in a way that justified their existence as rightful.

Catherine: Learning her own power and finding her place as empower-er

Catherine said, "I don't fit into organizations." She described herself as a "bulldozer", "tough" and "self-reliant", as constantly putting herself "out on a limb", as being "passionate" and "intense" about her work, as having "power". She said in organizations where she had worked she "asks too many taboo questions", found herself frequently "committing cultural suicide" by refusing to follow prescribed norms and regulations, and was usually bored to death by the repetition and lack of opportunity for freedom and creative expression. Catherine now was president and one of two full-time partners and seven associates of a company dedicated to helping organizations to integrate principles of continuous learning. The company was financially successful and growing. The company was also her life. She emphasized that work and the learning that emanated from her work and feeds her work *was* Catherine: she didn't exist apart from it. She worked at home (her photocopier occupied an enormous space in her dining room when I first met her), her husband was a partner in her business and their life together was often focused on the work.

> Organizations have a rigid paradigm. I get bored. I get fed up with the regulations. Why do we have to do it this way? I see the situation without the problem. When I decide to do something, I do it, and I do it my way. I put my heart into it, whatever it takes. Whatever the client wants, that's always been my way. We do whatever it takes, and everyone pitches in, whether that means stuffing envelopes late at night. . . Work isn't a separate part of my life, it is my life. . . .

She began her working career as a high school teacher of science and mathematics, and her first major learnings focused on mastering difficult new content and figuring out how to teach. Then as always, she relied on a few colleagues whom she selected and trusted as "mentors". She remembered sitting "right there with the kids" in one teacher's classes to learn a particular course and how to teach it. She decided what she wanted to learn and then in a most self-determined manner she went about finding the people who could help her learn what she needed. She was apparently quite fearless about trying new things. In her tenure as a teacher she decided to try teaching drama, with which she had no previous experience: "imagine, a science and math person doing drama!" She enrolled in a residential dramatic summer program to train herself, which she valued for its inspirational instructors (all practitioners, not teachers or professors) and its building of her confidence. Upon her return, in what proved to be typical challenge-seeking behavior over the course of her work-learning history, Catherine dived into probably the most challenging task a drama teacher could undertake: directing a musical.

Catherine was bold in approach and self-assured: not afraid of asking questions, leaping into a new project and figuring it out as she went. New opportunities, like job assignments and now new contracts, were gifts to explore: "Wow -- I'm like a child". She said she learned when young, through the examples and encouragement of her parents, to view every situation as a learning situation. She also celebrated her own learning successes and knowledge candidly. For example, she often referred to her success with the musical (she not only described the whole story to me, but also used it as an example in one of the learning circles she facilitates which I attended, and wrote it up in one of the newsletters her company circulated). She talked of the musical as not only a testament to risk-taking and people being able to overcome obstacles and master new things if they believe in them, but also as an example of her ability to create a "learning community". When Catherine showed me samples of the training manuals she designs for companies, she described them as examples of "astounding" quality. The workplace world she had created for herself and in which she said she was now ecstatically happy was self-invented: all people were co-learners. Catherine designed projects of labor around new areas of learning she wanted to explore based on clients' needs, guided the collaborative journey, then celebrated her own and others' learning process in ways that made the learning real.

Much of her current work was both writing educational materials for companies, and delivering stand-up training. She described herself as an excellent teacher, and claimed that one of the key ways she learned now was by teaching others what she read and found out: "I want to share it with everyone". She was a voracious consumer of new books and videos on management, systems theory, organizational learning, and general understandings of the universe. (Peter Senge was the writer Catherine cited most often): "this stuff becomes real when I use it." The information Catherine said she valued most were shifts in attitudes and beliefs, both her own and others'. She talked of "deep learning" -- understanding one's own mental models and meaning perspectives and changing these to be more effective.

Workplace experiences had been more important to her in her overall growth and learning than any formal learning. She always searched for or creates new problems to solve. In her current business, this search was naturally integrated into the nature of the work. In her work with other organizations, Catherine found herself actively seeking out challenging task assignments, and volunteering for new initiatives. She was happiest, she said, when everything was a "stretch". Even now when a contract was similar in purpose to something she had done before, she always found there was some very new problem or area of content to be figured out. Her favourite time in a learning process, which was usually some kind of work project, was where she began to feel herself "fly", where everything came easy, she knew all the places to go, and a "magic" happened among the people working with her. Then, said Catherine , "you suddenly hit an updraft and you flounder for a while until you fly again." When the updrafts stop, she explained, it's time to go find something new.

In workplace experience she realized that she learned best from people, especially those who Catherine described as "authentic" and who valued learning and inquiry. She especially liked people who pushed her, and she relied now on a few close associates whom she trusted and whom she could count on to always "push me to the edge." Her elder sister, a consultant specializing in gender differences, was a special mentor for her. Catherine claimed some of her most important learning was what she had understood through reflective conversations with her sister, clients, colleagues, and husband -- although she also pointed out, "I'm not a backwards thinker." In our conversation invoking critical incidents from her workplace past, Catherine referred a few times to the new strangeness of this sort of reflection on her past life.

Her metaphors were frequently drawn from the world of science and mathematics. She saw herself as part of an organic system of people that influence each other and the greater world through their interaction. She spoke in terms of "chaos theory," describing her workplace learning today, among her company's associates and the people she drew together into regular "learning circles", as a holograph: each person brought their own holograph to the group, and together "we generate other holographs. When we focus on a single task we are always aware of the bigger picture in which the task is being done." She seemed to truly be happiest when working with a group of people to share what she knew or had recently discovered. I watched her lead her "learning circle" one Saturday morning, and was amazed at the amount of formal explanation she gave (using flipcharts) in what I thought was a fairly informal gathering in her living room. When she found a new idea, like the Star Wars game she saw in a toy store and thought would make a great critical reflection tool, she said she couldn't wait to get people together to test it out in a teaching context.

Catherine was currently enrolled in an electronically-delivered M.Ed. program. She was disappointed in finding the same old structures that had always enraged her about formal post-secondary learning: authority hierarchies, rules and regulations, lack of tolerance for individual approaches or critical questions, sequential learning patterns and externally imposed criteria for assessment that were largely irrelevant to the learner, emphasis on the individual rather than group learning, and lack of learner freedom and opportunity for creative expression. Her own learning patterns through work had for her opened far more effective ways of constructing new meanings and learning her way through life.

Sarah: Learning to trust her own competence and embrace the adventure of learning

Sarah was a gentle, white-haired woman with bright eyes and pink cheeks who smiled often and widely. At the time of our last conversation she was still working as a coordinator for youth ministers in a Catholic social service agency. She loved her work, especially traveling about the parishes listening to the needs of young people and pulling together groups of the youth workers to discuss ways of helping kids more effectively.

When she returned to the work force after her husband left their marriage, she was raising her daughter and finishing a "ministry formation program" which taught her the skills of facilitation. The biggest value of the program, however, was the support offered by a group of peers who had bonded into a close, trusting, mutually caring community. The weekly meetings reinforced things Sarah was trying out in practice that were going well, and reassured her that the difficulties and surprises and frustrations were shared by others. Sarah said, "People were really awakened to who they were, what they were capable of, and how with a great deal of authenticity they could stand in the middle of their ministry and say, "This is who I am, this is what I do, and this was what I want to share with you."

Sarah said she loved learning. In her own work, what she named as a learning experiences tended to be times of dialogue, or sharing with colleagues. She placed a great deal of value on relationships and listening to people. Thus learning, for her, might be represented as becoming aware of, connecting to and making sense of what was going on in other people's heads: their ideas, information they've received, their plans, their feelings and responses to what was happening. She enjoyed her involvement with external committees for the exposure to other people, and the opportunity to find out how and what they thought and felt. Her biggest frustration in the workplace was certain norms of office politics which stifle open flowing "human" communication. She despised the "secrecy" generated by her church's hierarchy, resulting in sudden policies or program changes that typically shut down initiative and curtailed creative freedom. The more this happened, the more distanced she became so that now she laughed readily at program reversals coming from frightened parish priests who couldn't abide youth ministers who had autonomy and vision: "It's got to be, yes Father, no Father, three bags full Father." Her boss neither shared information with her nor participated in the collegial relationship she longed for:

> It's really hard because when I first came here for the first year and a half, there was a different coordinator, and we had a really good relationship with her and with the other secretary and the board, worked really well together. And it was team, team was our four-letter word, so that there was always information going back and forth. There was always consultation, there was always direction. Then we had a change of coordinator. It's not a team. He goes off and does whatever, very often without saying where he's going. He collects a lot of information and doesn't pass it on. . . . What I need to know is, have the rules changed? If the rules have changed, then I'll change my expectations. I won't expect team, and I won't expect cooperation, and that kind of thing . . . I'm not going to put myself under the stress of saying, "I'm frustrated because I'm not being consulted."

Sarah was left feeling adrift, directionless, disconnected from the organization. Her learning would have shut down were she and her work more dependent on this boss.

She grounded the center of her work purpose and therefore her learning in the people out in the parishes, to whom she viewed herself as a servant. She respected the talent of these people, their eagerness, energy, and professionalism working with kids, and their dedication demonstrated through long hours of work sometimes without much personal reward or recognition. She demonstrated through her stories that she learned much in this process about barriers facing youth ministers, the "numbers game" pressures and how to cope with them, as well as the principles of youth ministry and best ways to explore these through a balance of physical, social, and spiritual activity.

However, these were not the experiences she tended to describe when I asked her what she'd learned and how. Instead, her critical incidents of learning focused on changes she had perceived in her own frames of meaning and in her own behaviors. These critical incidents came from her personal life as well as in formal learning situations that had crossed over into her workplace learning. Sarah described at length the slow learning process after her husband left her ("like a victim all broken on the road after a hit-and-run accident"), of coming to trust her own capability to the point where she felt confident taking risks -- for instance, to take the kids out on a trailer holiday and back the trailer into a camping spot by herself, or to go out and find an office job.

Sarah talked with excitement about the learning transformation she experienced in a bible interpretation course when she let go of her old prejudices against literary methods of scriptural exegesis, and began to actually view herself as a legitimate reader of scripture, and constructor of knowledge. She told of facilitating a workshop ("I always sweat buckets ahead of time") where she found herself shifting the agenda quickly and frequently to accommodate what was happening: she learned that she was able to think spontaneously, to flexibly "go with the flow" -- a skill she had admired in others but hadn't really realized she'd developed. She also told of the time she couldn't persuade her supervisor to let her pull together staff to explore learning styles together, so she went ahead and organized an informal Saturday get-together for all interested. The turnout was so successful and her co-workers' feedback so positive, Sarah said she learned to trust her own instincts and take charge when she had an idea -- not waste energy getting permission from the workplace.

What all of these critical incidents have in common, it seemed to me, indicate what Sarah values in learning: confirmation of the self and its worth, and demonstration to herself of her own skills. The incidents also seem to indicate an overall learning directed towards helping people, getting things accomplished through people, and ignoring the bureaucracy. Sarah did not focus on the skills the bureaucracy deemed essential, nor did she necessarily attend particularly to the cultural norms and values that the organization directed its employees to follow so that they could be regulated and controlled. Technical skills never entered her descriptions of workplace learning, nor technology, nor the organization's mission and learning objectives. Her loyalties and therefore the site of her energies in both labor and learning appeared connected not to the organization in which her office and supervisor and the paper trail of her labor was situated, but to the network of people "out there" in the parishes.

Audrey: Learning to find peace in her own way of learning

Recently, Audrey re-married and settled into country life. Her husband was a retiree who loved to build things, like the boat he took on an outdoor Alaskan adventure tour. Saying that she had found peace for the first time in her life, Audrey in her mid-forties had settled into the leisurely rhythms of a working-learning-neighboring life. She took courses in writing and adult education, studied "learning in the workplace" through a distance graduate program, learned desk-top publishing and other computer skills on her own, led workshops in customer service when she got contracts, and hosted her neighbors and their children frequently (her own daughter teaches elementary school in the city). She loved to explore, and said she had finally learned how to allow herself to learn at her "own pace". For instance, she would take a computer manual to bed and read it slowly, highlighting parts she wanted to return to and study again, then very methodically try the procedure on her machine the next day while stopping to check the manual and the software help features. She knew she was "slow" because she had watched other people learn computer procedures "zap-zap-zap" -- but she said simply, "It doesn't go that fast for me."

I wanted to talk further with Audrey first because her overflowing love of learning was evident by her intense engagement in our classes, her ceaseless questions, her enthusiasm for gathering and scanning resources of all kinds, and her reflectivity, often drawing from and connecting new concepts to make sense of her past experience. Second, Audrey had initiated substantial career changes throughout her life entailing much workplace learning: not just workplace skills, she told me, but also significant changes in her personality, values, attitudes, and beliefs. She began her working life as a kindergarten teacher on a native reserve (Audrey and her daughter lived in the native community), left teaching on the reserve after many years to sell real estate, then became interested in adult education: Audrey taught adult women writing courses, then re-trained herself to deliver customer service workshops for a government agency. Recently she incorporated her own firm, offering desk-top publishing and training manual design services. But she said, she was not rushing anything as far as marketing or seeking contracts. Her life now stressed balance, meaning lots of daytime hours she might have spent working in the past were now devoted to husband, community, reading, and learning.

Learning how to teach by trial-and-error, or feeling-her-way-in-the-dark, was hard for Audrey. She remembered being terrified her first year in the classroom, feeling "like I don't know a thing" and panicking because of the responsibility: "Here's this child, now figure out what he needs and what you're going to do to help." Frantically Audrey would "spend hours every night preparing stuff." Telling people what to do was confusing for her, because "I had never been much of a leader."

It was when she was introduced to the teaching philosophy of "whole language" that Audrey began to relax, get excited about, have fun with, and see results from her own teaching efforts. She attended a workshop that presented whole language concepts in a way "that made sense." The key, she said, was that the instructors gave her a "model". She said she could "click" with a model that was clear and seemed to promise success -- it gave her the opportunity to actually try the new skill and experience some success. After that first hook and with the incrementally increasing confidence she got with each new initiative, Audrey found herself experimenting with all kinds of teaching methods: student journals, publishing class anthologies, convincing the school to buy a computer lab. With the students' success and involvement, Audrey found herself changing in other ways. She didn't feel the need to be in control so much, she focused more on helping everyone to "feel safe in that room", and she shifted more responsibility to the students: "I learned to say, this was your classroom. You have to make decisions about how it works. And if we have problems, you have to help solve them." As the students opened up and communication began to flow freely in the classroom, Audrey said she found herself "learning to like myself." Now, she called this an "ultimate truth", and a very important learning for her: her attitude about herself shaped how she acted, which affected how people interact with her, which shaped what she became. What's vital in working and achieving, she continues, was liking herself, then relaxing and listening to and opening up to understand those around her, then finding ways to harmonize with them, "like in singing".

This skill partly accounted for her success in real estate. Audrey apparently learned the pre-requisite skills and knowledge required to sell real estate without difficulty, but struggled at first with her intimidation by experienced buyers: "I'm not flashy enough, I guess . . . I felt that I had to really be on top of my stuff." She felt she didn't have "that spark", perhaps the strong will and motivation that she observed drove the other salespeople to "work the numbers." But what she did find was a fit between her slow-paced, nurturing approaches and the needs of nervous young first-time home buyers. In her few years' work in this capacity she learned from her successes that knowledge was not what made a sale, but understanding and listening. However, her successes did not compare favorably with those of her more aggressive colleagues. Audrey finally concluded, telling me that she wasn't of the right "ilk" to stay in real estate marketing.

Her transition from full-time work at a helter-skelter pace to her current life of peace and balance was wrapped with her decision to create a full and abundant life with much less money (Audrey said she lives now on about a third of her take-home teaching salary). This decision was enabled partly by her daughter's growing up, partly by meeting a man who lived the sorts of values Audrey was beginning to embrace, partly by Audrey's own personal soul-searching about her work life to date and her priorities, and partly by developmental changes she was experiencing. She appreciated herself too much to submit ever again to work tasks, organizational cultures or colleagues that undermined or brutalized her. Her workplace learning during and since this transition had proceeded at a pace and in a gentle unfolding that supported and confirmed her, rather than subjugating her to standardized performance competencies and measurement criteria, or foreign rhythms and values. For example, when Audrey talked through what she had learned teaching adult women, she neither got anxious about her performance nor beat herself up with her mistakes. She first mused about what she was seeing to make sense of it, asking herself: Is this a problem? How am I interpreting what's happening? Is this the only way to interpret this? To what extent was this mine or the learners' responsibility? How shall I appreciate what was happening? When working with a client to design a logo or brochure on the computer, Audrey devoted herself completely to the task. She viewed such an assignment as an opportunity to make a human connection with somebody, to learn and to have fun, not particularly to make money or build her sales network.

From this perspective, all happenings in Audrey's life were learning opportunities. She attended closely to what was happening in the here-and-now, not what she thought should be happening. The focal lens seemed to be, what can I learn about myself and about people from what I think I hear, see, taste, feel in this moment? Her workplace now was wherever she and "my cardboard boxes" of materials (the stuff of whatever project she happens to be acting upon at a given moment) were: the boundaries were not only blurred, they seemed to be non-existent between work and her leisure, her learning, her home, and her social and intimate relationships. Her priority for any activity was something that makes a contribution, which Audrey defined as giving "service" to people.

In comparing her (working) life now to how she remembered herself when she began teaching, Audrey recalled that she didn't really participate in the community, partly because she didn't feel she belonged. The community was both the staff group and the larger community of the native reserve which interconnected with the school web in close ways. When she started teaching, Audrey said she was too focused on the immediate activity confronting her, the needs of the children in the classroom. She failed to acknowledge the vital importance of her and her class's connection to the larger systems of interwoven communities. Without that connective link, both she and the community became mutually suspicious, then critical of each another. Because she worked and learned as if her classroom were a single isolated cell, she was overwhelmed not only by the burden of responsibility and the difficulties which she tried to shoulder all by herself, but also by ostracization and blocks to her freedom, created by the outside community -- all external pressures which she realized later might never have occurred had she understood that she was an interactive part of a larger whole, and actively participated in that community whole.

Later in her teaching career on the reserve (Audrey took off several months to recuperate after a particularly stressful year) Audrey approached the community with openness, taking the initiative to understand "where they're coming from" and accepted these people for what they really were. For the first time she learned what it felt to be connected. Today, in a different home community, Audrey talked of the growth experience in giving with "unconditional love". She spent much time talking and walking with people in her community, babysitting their children, helping with their projects:

> I really pitch in now, and haven't worried about boundaries. It requires lots of commitment. But when you learn to give that way there's something that comes back that's much greater. The sense of community, of belonging. I'm a valuable part of that system, I'm contributing.

But when Audrey stepped psychologically into the "workworld", for instance thinking about approaching potential clients for her business services, and finding ways to adapt her philosophies to what she believed people wanted "out there", she became frustrated and a little panicked. When she worked for two weeks with other more aggressive participants from business in a distance education M.Ed. program, Audrey felt "rushed", "intimidated", and "off balance", not excited but scattered and depressed. Her descriptions pointed to a polarity between the two "worlds" and thus an inner tension that she struggled to understand. In the home-neighborly world, her intuitive sense of "fit" and personal "grounding", and the liberation of her creativity and learning-exploring impulses came alive. When she led workshops for women in journal writing, she was excited by the process and results. But neither these workshops nor her community work paid much, and her self-perceived lack of fit with the "workworld" (which she defined now as business and government) sometimes left her wondering if she had anything to exchange that was valued by this world. Meanwhile she was, when I last spoke with her, snug and happy in her life working at her learning and learning through her work out in the country: "I've finally found peace, you know what I mean?"

Janis: Learning to trust, nurture, and delight in the self

Janis was a film animator. As we sat sipping herbal tea in her apartment condominium lined with plants and bookshelves, I noted the unusual ornament she wore over her heart: a salamander made of bone. Janis told me a story that was quite representative of the way she worked and lived. The salamander, she explained, had come to her in a dream and curled over her heart where she felt its warmth pumping. It was used by alchemists in their experimentation to forge gold in the searing heat of their crucibles. The salamander was a confluence of knowledge, the soul of fire, the gathering and coalescing of many elements into one pure creation. Salamander Productions became the name of Janis's animation studio where two or three artists worked full-time and as many as two dozen apprentice animators and editors are brought in for work on specific projects.

Janis's work history seemed to have moved from project to project, rather than from workplace to workplace. She had edited different films developed by a national production studio, researched material for films produced by various studios in Alberta, written scripts for educational videos, and of course created her own films. In recent years Janis began formally teaching animation courses, and continued to bring students into her own projects to coach their learning. As Janis talked about her various learnings through these projects that were her work I began to discern three areas of knowledge, all interrelated and all closely entwined with her own personal development in life and deepening self-awareness: first was the knowledge of her craft skills (including both technical and communicative skills) as an editor, animator, and entrepreneur in the film-making business; second was the knowledge of herself: her own strengths, preferences, intuitive voices, and her limits which need protecting from the workworld; and third was her growing knowledge of people, and how to join hands and hearts with them to create the best possible film while meeting her own and their needs.

Janis learned the technical foundation in an editing course that "gave me the credibility to actually get a job", and a post-secondary technical program in animation that she recalled now as grueling and undermining. But she credited her most significant learning to her jobs in film, which she experienced before heading to Ontario to study formally. When Janis started work in films she was a recent BA graduate wondering what to do with her life. Her summer job working on a university film was a whirlwind of learning. She remembered vividly the exciting pleasure of the work-learning, though the hours were long and wearying, and the nature of the work continually surprising (scrabbling in the mud sound-taping pigs one moment and nosing through the archives' stacks for historical information the next). What made this such a positive learning experience? Janis recalled especially the variety of things she was able to try doing, and feeling part of a close team all holding on to each other. She herself was shown exactly what to do to get started in each task, and was given certain creative freedom while still feeling others supporting the load of her responsibility. She was never abandoned to simply "figure it out", as some of the women had experienced in their apprenticeship: thus the multiple challenges were exciting, not overwhelming.

One of the most important skills she learned was how to "tap into the inner life force", how to let go and find her own voice as an artist in animation. About animation, Janis said:

> To create interesting and convincing characters, animators have to be able to access a variety of inner resources. They have to stretch their imagination, tap into kinesthetic body knowledge, relax conscious control of their characters, enter a playful, receptive state, and allow the unconscious to provide details of temperament, motivation, and emotion. To play means to risk looking like a fool. Anyone who plays risks looking dumb or weird or not in control. It's scary for most people. It's scary for me, most of the time. But it's also invigorating. When I create animation, especially when I approach the process in a playful way, I find myself personally animated by the process. By this I mean that energy is flowing through me, the right side of my brain is having a field day, and I'm enjoying myself.

Through projects early in her career Janis not only learned what to do and how to do it well (in a variety of ways: she enjoyed many respect-worthy role models), but also how people behaved on an ideal film project. "There is a camaraderie.... Everybody had to pitch in and do whatever was necessary. If you don't know how to do it, somebody shows you." The people in her early learning that Janis remembered most were those practitioners who were patient, letting her watch side-by-side as they worked, answering any question she had. She said people will say "I can tell who you were working with today, just by the mood you're in." Learners absorbed much more than skill from their chosen role models.

For Janis, the act of film-making was one and the same with learning. Step one in her approach to everything new was to "get up the energy to make it fascinating", whether it was moose ticks or grey alluvial soil. Whatever situation she found herself working in, whatever course she took, Janis said she tried to "mine deep" and "get out as much as I could." Then the process of film-making and learning was one of continual exploration. First was the hook of the idea, then came quickly the focus or structure, whatever grounded her in a clear vision ("you have to really get into it or you'll go crazy"). Then she playfully follows the flight of feathery ideas slipping about on the periphery of conscious, finally honing and pulling to bring it together, even "killing the babies" (film talk for the toughest cuts -- like that dawn shot it took days to get). The work Janis loved best, she said, were the projects she knew nothing about, that caused her to sit back and scratch her head "How the hell do I approach this?" The work that was hardest were projects similar to things she had done before, where she had to generate ways to make it fresh and exciting. The work she hated (and had learned how to avoid) were "cookie-cutter" projects where she was simply expected to expertly apply a formula that she had perfected.

Film work was team work, and learning how to mesh with other people had been a key thread in Janis's "workplace" learning. She had learned to treasure as gifts those precious few with whom she could really "click", like her partner. The two women complemented each other's strengths, she explained. She had survived and learned how to sense ahead those dysfunctional projects where the film's team became laced with high levels of turmoil and anxiety. In one story she told, the documentary's perfectionist director put them all under such pressure with her obsessive insecurity and indecisiveness, that the film almost didn't get completed after months of work. The incident was profound for her, proving to her that her "inner voice" was right and must be trusted to lead her out of danger.

Teaching was an important source of learning for herself, said Janis. She talked much of empowering young artists, acting as midwife to their growth, learning how to support them in their own preferences, even if it was Disney-derivative, and help them find their own voices even if it was Japanese animee, which didn't happen to suit her own taste. The learning had been finding the delicate balance between coaching or waiting, showing or questioning, encouraging or simply standing by. She described herself coaching on a film project of her own, where even under a deadline pressure she truly enjoyed stopping everything to show or explain something in response to a learner's questions. Animation, she explained, is

> a highly irrational process. It can be a really big challenge for new animators to become irrational. But it's absolutely necessary to rely on intuition, kinesthetic knowledge, emotional memory, and whole kit bag of inner resources that are like the imaginative equivalent of an artist's tools. As the characters become alive, so does the animator. And as the animator becomes more energized, empowered, playful, and empathetic, so the characters grow and change. Watching and helping others to achieve this is thrilling.

Janis's interest in what she called "inner work", generated through the personal exploration demanded of animators, had taken her into journalling, meditation, and dream analysis. She valued experiences, people, resources and reflective activity that helped her "give voice" to articulate more precisely her inner issues. Over the years Janis had learned through the grueling pace and demands of the film industry (equipment and location-shooting was expensive so workers are expected to go "flat out" during the filming period, often without wages until the film begins to make money), that she had limits of energy and health that others were not prepared to acknowledge if she did not protect certain personal boundaries. Increasingly Janis had learned how to achieve the difficult balance that had to be found between supporting her needy and talented friends in the starving Canadian film industry, and keeping herself sane and whole. She had learned to avoid diving whole-heatedly into what looked like an exciting project, to stop and weigh carefully the possible consequences of her involvement. Sometimes she felt she wasn't the best person, given the skill and personality match of the team. Sometimes the learning benefit or the fun of working with a particular person would suffice for the salary that was not available.

And increasingly, Janis was finding the ability to "walk away." At our last conversation she was readying herself to leave her studio, on the heels of completing an award-winning animation short, for an indeterminate "sabbatical." Feeling drained by the hurly-burly external pressures of the workworld, she sensed she needed time to rejuvenate her inner source, the artist. Her work-life-art learning had led her to a new bend in the road: she felt able to leave her work as she had known it up to that point, able to step courageously forward to something scary and unknown, and able to explain to herself and others exactly why she was making this choice.

Conclusion

The threads woven through each of these portrayals are diverse, and penetrate broad issues of life's meaning and purpose or calling to a particular vocation. It is apparent in all of these work-histories that most women do not compartmentalize their everyday life at a "job site" separately from the flow of reflection, action, and being that comprises the totality of their lifeworlds. Learning became, in their stories of work, a general metaphor for the way they lived and breathed: open to new experiences, constantly interpreting and making meaning of these experiences, and struggling to make choices based on these meanings. The centrality of the metaphor of seeking, and especially seeking the self, is unmistakable in these women's stories of their workplace learning and career choices. Also noteworthy are the various triggers for incidents that women describe as critical learning experiences, the ways in which the women attend to these triggers and frame the meanings that unfold from them, the contextual influences and women's subject positions intersecting in these experiences, and the patterns of the learning process that emerged. These dynamics will be analysed in more detail in the following sections.

Chapter 5

Intentionality: Choosing Passion through Continuous Seeking, Challenge, and Moral Integrity

> This is how we learn. Human life is very big. There is no short cut from Minneapolis to New Mexico. My car had to cover every mile. We learn with every cell and with time, care, pain, and love. I'm sure that many times when the marathon monks woke at midnight to prepare to run, they had an urge to go back to sleep, but the path was ahead of them. We, who are not marathon monks, wake up and have the toothbrush before us -- brushing our teeth! the great ritual that gets us out of bed--then we have the blank page in front of us, or the school bus, or the phone ringing. We all go on down that highway. Our life is the path of learning, to wake up before we die. (Goldberg, 1993, p. xiii)

Overall, the work-learning histories of the women participating in this study suggest that the workplace is potentially rich with developmental possibilities, especially when an individual exercises autonomy and creativity in naming what is worth doing, what is valuable knowledge, and what is her idiosyncratic way of constructing this knowledge. This idiosyncratic construction of knowledge -- the learning process -- flows from the way a woman participates in and configures her workplace experience. From an analysis of the stories, three dimensions emerged which appear to significantly influence this participation and configuration: intention, disjuncture, and positionality. These dimensions contain psychological as well as socio-cultural-political dynamics, and are dialectically entwined. (1) the *intentions* or will and desire of the woman at a particular time in a particular community; (2) the *disjuncture* or rupture between the woman's previous biography of experience and the situation immediately confronting her; and (3) the *positionality* of how a woman construes herself as a knowledge creator in relation to the object of knowing and the general knowledge community in which her learning is entwined. These three dimensions are presented in the next three chapters. As well, heuristically, the embodiment of self as figure and ground for learning was also evident from the analysis. This is discussed in chapter 9.

This chapter begins with a description of the first dimension, intentionality, and of the aspects evident in the data, then a section relating these findings to the literature.

Intention in Workplace Learning

The stories of the women I interviewed seemed to reflect one important theme above all: they learn continuously in the workplace, and what they name as "learning" is what they *want* to understand. How they defined what interested them or what they wanted to make meaning of was whatever they perceived as being immediately related to their life intentions.

The intentions of women in this study which seemed to exercise the strongest influences on their workplace choices, working style, and learning in work were those of continuous seeking. Three themes of intention which emerged in this study will be discussed in the following three sections: how many of these women seek creative challenge and risk, how many of these women seek work which integrates a moral integrity of purpose serving the common good, and how many of these women seek passion in their daily work. Each of these themes, the broad workplace intentions voiced by the women of this study, will be explored along with their sub-themes in terms of how these intentions influence learning.

Seeking creative challenge and risk in work

> I like change and I like variety. And if I do the same thing too long, I get bored. Challenge kind of drives me to move on. As I conquer one challenge, I need to be on with the next one. As soon as that gets routine, I'm out looking, right? It's important for me to keep growing and keep learning. -- Liz

One of the most powerful themes in this study, echoed in almost every interview, was the need expressed by every woman for risk and challenge. Many described this need for creative challenge in their work as a need for learning -- a need to be continually seeking to know.

These women consistently made career choices poising them on the precarious edge of risk that deprives them of this kind of comfort. They volunteered for projects that they didn't know anything about. They confronted the status quo around them by asking questions that won them enemies. As soon as a job or task became comfortably easy, they looked for new risks and creative challenges. Sometimes they quit a job just when they had starting to really make money doing it. In fact, the choice for change and continuous learning may have been irreconcilable with the discourses of success and its promotional rewards in the current paradigms of mastery governing performance assessment in the workplace. Elana said somewhat ruefully, in looking back over her career, "I sometimes compare myself with others. I think, I could have been further along that corporate ladder. Look where that person ended up! I'm as bright as they are. But I know in my heart that I never valued being high up that ladder. I valued change. I valued learning." She believed that learning or success is an either-or choice in her workplace.

Stretching the job to find more creative challenge

> I throw myself into the deep water frequently and I have to watch it because I overload myself sometimes. But the opposite situation, where there's no change and no opportunity to learn, is worse . . . What I try to do with a job is to make it more complicated. Find more depth, more learning, more substance. If I can't make it more complicated, then I die in a job. I just die. -- Elana

It appears to be the case that for a continuous learner, every job has a learning cycle. A steep slope of learning accompanies entry into a new job or organization. This is the period of great excitement and high energy, especially if the new worker is supported and set up to experience a string of successes that weave a fabric of competence buoyant enough to absorb the failures and mistakes. This is followed by a period of small incremental changes. Mental energy relaxes, a worker notices more of the details in the tasks and environment, and settles in with a certain comfy-old-slipper satisfaction. This is the period of wider ranging experimentation when the worker is "stretching" the job, finding new things to do, changing procedures, based on a foundation of the sure competence -- I know what I'm doing. Eventually, however, there comes a time where she realizes there is nothing more new, and no way for her to create the newness that had fueled her engagement, at least that she could see. At that moment she might feel almost as though she is beginning to die.

> I remember sitting at the typewriter. I didn't have a word processor in those days. Sitting gripping the typewriter. Telling myself, you cannot get up and get a glass of water. Do not go for a walk. Sit here and write these bloody scripts. I had done three, they went over well. But I had six more to go. Over and over. There was nothing left for me to learn. It was blood sweat and tears doing the last three. So deadening. -- Janis

In many of the work stories, a woman described how much she'd truly enjoyed a job while she was learning "the ropes", before she came to this deadening moment where she felt she was just applying old learning to new situations. Denise had loved her job in training, loved working in a large corporation that assigned her to new projects and provided staff support and training so that she could succeed in those projects. Then:

> I felt I was going backwards, not enough challenges. I could have stayed -- it was great security, but my brain has to be stimulated! I didn't want to go to work. I couldn't get out of bed. I couldn't think clearly. I became obsessed with hating my job.

This lethargy, this "stuck place", was experienced by others. Some women reported becoming fearful, apathetic. Elana was intrigued by this paradox.

> You should have all this energy left over at the end of the day when you don't have to do all these new things . . . . But in that situation [where there's no change] I become depressed and more and more lethargic. Until I get desperate. And then I break out of it some way, somehow. Because the longer you stay where you're not learning, the more your self-esteem is eroded. -- Elana

At this point in the job cycle, when the work felt stagnant with the lack of challenge and new learning opportunities, a typical strategy the women used to create variety and change was to take on a multitude of tasks. Liz designed her work so she was doing several things at once -- she knew she had a short attention span and a need for spontaneity. Carla said, "I'm used to doing three or four things at once -- now that I'm only doing a couple of things at once I'm saying, gee, what's wrong here? I'm bored." Multi-tasking was one way that these women created challenge, by keeping their energy levels high and thus stimulating their thinking. An important dimension here is that they chose and structured the tasks for themselves.

Another strategy at this mid-point of a job cycle was to invent excuses to learn more, by trying to do things differently. After five years managing her bank branch, Carla said:

> I guess now I try to search for how else can I do it? What other ways? What can I do that's different? I didn't do that as a manager five years ago when I was still developing . . . looking for another angle , maybe a shortened process or improve a situation or maybe help the district. -- Carla

Wendy had enjoyed several years as a counselor working with alcohol and drug dependent clients. The staff was "great -- lots of clowning around and just good camaraderie," the learning opportunities plentiful, but one day:

> It had gone. The learning urge was just . . . gone. I was feeling burdened by client problems. I wasn't feeling energized or interested in learning

> another counseling technique. I was just feeling drained by it all. I was really just . . . tired of it.-- Wendy

Looking for creative challenge in work outside the job

Different women often coped with their unmet need for challenge and change at work by seeking a creative project outside the workplace which inspired their learning. These projects were not hobbies to provide relaxation, but demanding projects chosen by these busy women, thirsty for more learning. Some sought contract employment or administrative volunteer work in their off-hours for the learning challenges these endeavors provided. Denise, who continually took courses, enrolled in a certificate program to be completed at night, without plan or goal or sufficient funds: "I needed those courses! I was so thirsty, I had to do something to learn." Catherine, a science and math teacher assigned to work in an organization she called "the graveyard," directed a full-length community play which she took into a festival and won. She also explained: "I had to do something. I was going crazy." Elizabeth and Audrey both began home businesses in sales when they began experiencing frustrated stagnation in their jobs as government manager and teacher respectively. Their businesses were in areas far removed from their "official" expertise, which they ran in their "spare" time. Elana had always been able to set her creative needs loose in her work. But now that the organization was shutting down her freedom to control her own projects, her source of "aspiration", Elana was feeling more and more trapped and desperate. She who had poured so much into her work life with this organization in the past years now was seeking non-job work projects to "pursue the creative side of me."

Giving up and moving to a new job for creative challenge

Eventually, though, the stories of a job that simply couldn't be stretched anymore to meet the hunger for newness, for challenge, for learning, ended in a woman quitting the job. Catherine told stories of a work history characterized by leaving jobs that didn't offer new challenges that prompt learning experiences: "I get bored. I can't work in an organization." Elana also saw clear patterns in her career biography -- "This was your job and this was what you were allowed to do. You were put in a box. And I would stretch that box as far as I could, recognize that there was no way to stretch it further in that organization. So I would jump out of that box, jump into the next one."

The decision to leave seems to become the enactment of a familiar ritual. A woman who has left before recognizes the rhythms of boredom, the gradual acknowledgment of her loss of engagement with this work, then accepting that her need for change requires a dramatic decision. She knows the signals in her mind and body. Carla simply sensed it was becoming time to leave her bank branch: "To tell you the truth, I'm feeling stagnant now." She felt well past the learning that absorbed her in her initial years mastering the details in managing this branch, then gradually pushing the standards of excellence wherever she could find ways to improve the branch service, then finally dreaming up a project for her branch unique to the country, developing a personal just-in-time tips manual collaboratively with the Personal Banking Representatives.

To enter the somewhat intimidating process of leaving a job in pursuit of new challenge and learning, one needs either confidence or the supreme commitment of will that comes with knowing anything has got to be better than this. Elana left salary and predictable certainty to go to university riding the courage of her knowledge that "it was far worse to become what I would've if I'd stayed." One day Persephone walked out on a job at noon -- "there was no contact with people, nothing but sitting filing these little cards. I couldn't do that to myself" -- with no other options available that she could perceive. Carla, however, had a certain confident assurance supporting her admission to herself that "it's time to move": her bank corporation will find her a new place to move, laterally or perhaps even vertically. Kirsten had always landed on her feet, found new meaningful work. Now she was "itching to leave" her Human Resources position and this large organization and watched herself starting to withdraw from her work projects. She knew what was happening. This was a time when she reflected on her work, just as she was "winding down this job." She asked herself, "Okay, what have I learned? Not just subject material but what I've learned about myself, about my own work, about how to do things with other people. How is it different now from when I started?"

What is apparent in this phenomenon of some individuals continually leaving their jobs in particular organizations is that they view themselves as the central economic unit. They do not necessarily feel loyal to or enmeshed in their organizations. The organization, from their vantage point, provides activity and clusters of people that serve their needs for challenge, creative expression, stimulating engagement, and continuous seeking. When they perceive that these needs are no longer being fulfilled, they move on. And they take their learning with them:

> I find myself itching for something different. Like, my mind and my body are saying, "Okay, time to wrap up. Where's the new thing to do? Where's the new people to meet? And, where's the new things to learn?" Not that I'm not learning now, but somehow part of me is ready for the next big challenge. -- Kirsten

Mooring the longing for challenge and change: seeking security and structure

Entwined with the search for challenge and change is the need for security and structure. A continuing tension is played out as these woman sought to find fulfillment for these contrasting needs in their intentions of work. The search for security led many women to seek work in an organization despite their distaste for institutional regulatory control and surveillance. Human nature seems bent upon reducing ambiguity, creating patterns of cause-effect that can help predict, order elements in cognitively manageable relationships, and thus control the world. Yet these women also sought personal challenge, risk, and change. But this ambition for passion needs the resistance of solid structure to exist. To unstabilize existing systems, resist the closure of absolutes, and melt the hard margins of structural boundaries they needed the lines of the structures against which their energy of resistance could become real, and gather itself into its own shape. Thus the seeking for creative challenge in work must moor itself in the object world of stable, if constricting material or imaginative structures. Janis's work making films captures this tension between seeking freedom and challenge and seeking structures and order clearly:

> Animation is anything you can imagine, you can draw, you can paint, you can sculpt, there's a freedom. . . . to create a whole world. It's an antidote to the here-and-now. But there should be a structure, a focus that comes quickly . . . .I need the structure, I like to get down to business. Animation is the film medium that offers the most exceptional control -- you're controlling all the sounds, you're controlling all the action, the actors can't talk back. -- Janis

Wendy chose work as a free-lance contractor for the freedom and control of her own time. She didn't really need the work, her husband had a full-time job and they had what they needed, but she never turned down work if she could help it. "I need to work.

It structures my time." She said each contract is an excuse to research an idea, to learn something new that she wouldn't otherwise justify the time to pursue.

Denise said, "I like and need security. I try to make myself valued as an employee so that I can sit back and relax." For Denise, relaxation meant having the freedom to pursue challenges: exploring new projects, experimenting with new activities, and learning. When she came across a new project that required her to make sense of a new field of information and skills, the first thing she did was to create a structure for herself. The new advertising project began with Denise phoning everyone she could think of who knew something she could learn from, and developing a grid for herself of the things she needed to learn. The structure lent a sense of control, of security, as she moved gradually into this new world of learning.

"I like putting things in order. I used to help my mom in the library. Nothing made me happier than to sit there and file cards. I just instinctively put things in order wherever I go." Kirsten's way of dealing with the frequent ruptures to her workworld caused by government reorganization was to maintain order around the tasks within her domain of control. Her worktasks all had deadlines and goals. Even though the "dead" lines were in fact alive and slithering, and the goals tended to dissolve with new organizational priorities, she performed her daily work activities within these lines, stretching them as needed to allow her a sense of creative expression and challenge in her work.

Learning shuts down when there's either too much structure or too much challenge and change. The issue of salary as symbol of employment security often surfaces to disturb the delicate tension between the security of structure and the excitement of challenge to this structure that sustains the ongoing learning of someone continually growing and changing within the job cycle. Elizabeth stayed with the government department far too long, she says, mostly because she was afraid, as a single mother, what would happen to her if she left. She complained that she had stagnated in her current job, quit learning, lost her love for it. She frequently mentioned her regrets staying with this "traditional" "overly bureaucratized" organization. "I can't think in all these little boxes they've created. I'm much more free-wheeling."

While Elizabeth's learning and other vital needs were stifled by the rigid structures of her workplace, Marilyn was now struggling at the other end of the spectrum to create enough structures to shape a comfortable work dwelling where she could learn and direct her energies actively. She was pursuing a dream of doing the kind of public consultation that was true to her ideals of continuous interdependent learning and community building. But she was talking now of feeling panicky, especially with her new mortgage, because she doesn't have contracts lined up for the next months. "The voices start chattering . . . you're not doing anything worthwhile, because you're not getting paid for what you spend your days doing." She talked of the urgency to fill the vacuum of time, to rush out and find work, tasks which would crowd out the deeper task of thinking through and following up a recent important meeting by spending time talking with the people that went through a change process there.

Paradoxically, Marilyn remembered back to times in her life when she submitted to the crush around her to do what the structures of the workplace seemed to demand:

> In many ways Ottawa was terrible . . . it was a chaotic situation, there was no order. What we were doing didn't make sense. They were in charge but there was no one to say, "Here's what I expect of you, here's

> what I can offer you". It was so distressful. I was tired all the time . . . it cost me. -- Marilyn

In retrospect in her telling of this story, Marilyn said that the sense of no order back then came from "going into a workplace and feeling I have to put away my feelings. Living in a male world, proving myself, driving myself." Now she looks back on those years with "a real sadness. My real self never came to surface. My feelings are my gift to share. I'm beginning to believe now that my femininity is the greatest thing I have to offer in a meeting, listening and understanding, fostering real sharing." In retrospective revelations about her work experience, Marilyn seemed to have discovered that her sense of purpose had shifted. With this shift, she had returned to her previous understandings of what knowledge is most valuable, and revised these understandings significantly. She not only re-storied her previous learnings -- through her new perspectives she was seeing new lessons and dismissing old meanings as no longer relevant or worthwhile -- but she was also entering a deeper learning process than simply discerning what were previously invisible "lessons learned" from experience. She was confronting her most fundamental value structures: the purpose she is seeking.

Choosing work that integrates a moral purpose

Most of these women said they wanted to make a meaningful contribution to the world. They wanted to help and heal and serve. They sensed that they had something special to offer. They approached their work as an opportunity to give this something towards helping the world to be a better place.

This is an ideal, constrained by many conflicts: external conflicts, such as work organizations structured by goals of profit rather than serving society, and internal conflicts such as doubts about personal motives, and personal material interests that directly oppose one's pursuit of idealized common good purposes. But the ideal still functions as a powerful driver of these women's choices of how, why, where, and in what capacity they work. And thus these women's ideal intention of achieving coherence between their work and their sense of personal moral purpose significantly shaped their workplace learning.

Long ago Marilyn volunteered to be a member of a local recreation board as a more enticing choice for her than morning coffee conversations with other mothers at home with children. Her strongest memories of that long-ago board center on a project which she chaired:

> I thought because our mandate was recreation we should be looking at programs and volunteerism, not just facilities. I was questioning all the time, should we be doing this? Is this the best way to be doing this? . . . The community's assumption was that they would build an indoor swimming pool. But as we went through the questioning process, it became very clear that this community could not and would not afford an indoor swimming pool. I went out across the province and I said, okay, which communities have built facilities and how are they paying for them and what has been the effect on the community? Swimming pools lose money. $100,000 minimum a year. You have to be willing to pay those taxes to support that pool. There have been communities who have been totally decimated by having to pay taxes on big indoor facilities which they didn't need. So I asked the community at a big public meeting, is our goal to have the kids swimming? Or is our goal to build the building? . . . [I suggested] we work with the county. We got a bus which to this day

> runs in the summer, takes our kids to the next town and they got to go swimming. The question we had to ask ourselves was, What are we really trying to do here?

As I listened to other work-learning stories Marilyn told I heard the harmonics of that final question continuing to ring. Work tasks all have a bottom-line purpose. The trick is to peel back the wrappings and name the core intention. When the real intention is clear, the important questions emerge and the information required to answer them becomes apparent. From there, the learning process was a simple one of locating resources and gathering the information. Undergirding Marilyn's way of working was also the search for a guiding sense of personal purpose, an intention that could be intuitively validated as the "right" one, the one she felt she was meant to fulfill: "What am I supposed to be really trying to do here?"

This learning story from a pivotal early work experience shows too how success can confirm the importance of purpose. Marilyn took the risk of challenging the board and community using her intuitive sense of asking core questions to guide her, and did the necessary leg-work to make good her challenge. The results of the project realized her intentions and confirmed her purpose-oriented way of working through challenge and creating. At the time of writing she worked as a consultant with communities in Alberta who were struggling to develop a vision, make a plan, find resources and take action to grow stronger.

Being called to a purposeful vocation

Some women grow into their purpose, as they extend themselves over the years into the various activities that they think of as comprising their practice. Some invent their own vision of purpose for their work. Others listen for a "call" by a divine power to a purpose in their work. The experience of being called to a particular vocation was a very real one for some of these women, whether they regard this call as spiritually based or not. This call to a particular vocation was not necessarily permanent. When they feel it's time to move on, the struggle to discern what was an authentic "call" for their next choice can create turmoil.

Marilyn and Persephone, both women in mid-life, believed that their work purpose was divinely inspired, and their responsibility was to "listen" carefully to the voices around them and to the outcomes of their experiences for clues that would guide them in fulfilling this purpose. "What am I supposed to be doing? What is it I am being prepared for? How am I supposed to be using this for greater service? What lessons are You trying to teach me in all this? More than any other time in my life I believe I need to be still and listen." Marilyn not only needed a sense of overall purpose, her actions and decisions in her working life were based upon a firm belief that she was serving a special purpose. Although the minimal salary coming in now sometimes caused concern, she was struggling to quell the urge to rush out and get lost in the busy-ness of another job until she figured out the purpose that should guide her next career choices.

When Persephone was invited to write a book about the church, she felt at once terrified and ecstatic:

> I'd been at home for a few years, I guess, but I was just feeling totally useless. I guess I was in a bad depression. And I got down on my knees and I started to pray -- "God, I really need to do something. I have to feel part of this world". Then suddenly, I got this call from the priest, and I said yes before I even thought about how much work it would be. I was

> so excited. Well I had to go meet my daughter to walk her home from school, and I literally skipped across the snow. I just thought, "Someone called me! Someone needs me!"

She "knew" she had been called for a special purpose. She was intimidated by the daunting task facing her, the impossibly short timelines. She was afraid of not knowing the what or the how she needed. But she had been trusted, and called to do it. The purpose fueled the energy to learn, the responsibility granted her the power to learn, and the finished book was a product of pride.

Creating or uncovering a vision of purpose

Vision is a picture, a way of unifying the confusing fragments of one's daily tasks and experiences that compose what one thinks of as "work activity." A vision carries with it energy, a momentum of forward direction that crystallizes the intentions that drive learning. A vision connects the self of the present moment to something larger.

There are two kinds of vision: personal vision, a picture of oneself in the future, and community vision, a big picture of how all the parts connect, a picture linking oneself and one's actions to others and their actions. How do people form a vision? How does vision function to shape intention, and thus learning?

> I'm learning something that intrigues me, that's valuable. I don't do the day-to-day dealing with people and their initial problems, I don't classify positions or do the daily grind that drives me mad. I'm a visionary, I look at how we're going to get the organization from where we are now to where we're going . . . . Even when we're in incredible flux, I can stay . . . because I'm still learning. -- Elana

Elana projected herself into narratives at a future and distant point -- which was an escape from the mundane, the routine here-and-now of labor that reproduces what is. Her sense of herself in a learning mode was essentially an experience of visioning, of living in the future. She could locate a fixed point in the future; then she could locate her own purpose in this vision. The vision became the source of her creative excitement, the reality which propelled her work and gave it meaning.

Janis, the artist, just naturally thought in pictures. She got an all-at-once vision of an entire film from some hook that intrigues her. With her recent animated feature, a man came to her with a crazy western song about dancing cactuses which immediately created pictures in her head. When she started developing the proposals for it, the vision came together. This vision sustained her through the years of labor required to produce the four-minute animated short which won her a national award took three years to create. The vision became real as she talked about it, drew it, and wrote it. She learned as she figured out the details of the vision -- "What personality should a dancing cactus have? What kinds of sounds would create a cactus hoe-down? How do we layer these sounds onto the song?"

Elana stated in measured, emphatic language, a clear personal vision for herself at seventy years old: "a strong, healthy woman, a woman who knows what's going on in the world, who's participating in the world, very much alert and alive, physically and mentally strong is very important to me. It has nothing to do with money, but it has a lot to do with what I've contributed to society. It's this picture of who I am. And that's the driving force that keeps me grounded . . . because it would be easy to go completely crazy here." Liz spent time in processes of creative visioning: "I get the vision of what I want, then it'll come. Everything I'm doing works towards that vision." Carla was a bank manager today because she'd always dreamed to be a bank manager. Catherine was excited about her new dream for expanding her business using a "learning circle" process she developed that has proven effective. She told associates and friends, clients, and potential new clients about a continually evolving learning circle for educating adult educators, and with each telling the vision was more real, with more of the practical details becoming clear through the responses she got.

In each of these stories three threads are noteworthy. First, each woman found a stabilizing point for herself in the teleological pull of the future vision, in the where-I'm-going, rather than in the anchors of the past, where-I've-been, or in the messages of the present. In fact, women often echoed sentiments from certain psychology bestsellers that the past was "baggage", that "letting go" of the past was an important step to self-liberation, that "getting on with your life" was the more important agenda than "backwards thinking". From this stabilizing point was launched a sort of backwards trajectory which created narrative meaning of the present's fragmentary moments of experience: "I'm working towards something -- this is the force that drives me".

Second, a woman's vision appears to function differently than a goal, because like a mirage on the horizon, the vision appears constantly before the woman. As she continues her journey she doesn't shorten the distance between herself and the vision; as she moves, the vision also moves before her. Like the dreamer's refusal to meet the ground in the falling dream, she continually defers confronting her destiny. Thus her sense of herself as a continual seeker was sealed in the framework in which she constitutes her purpose, through her vision of the future. Perpetual hope was thus possible. Today's trials serve a preparatory purpose for what is to come, which will be better than what was now.

Third, although women talked a great deal about the inspiring power of vision in their work, no one alluded to an organizational vision except in a dismissive sort of way, or to a vision set by someone else such as a leader, that they had internalized. The vision that compelled their work came from inside themselves. It was is personal; it was painted from a tray of moral colours and meanings; it is a picture centering the self in the future, not a picture of the self as an adjunct part of someone else's vision.

The needs that drove these women most in their work -- for personal engagement and excitement, for challenge and change, for the chance to serve others, and always for learning new things, seemed most related to what Abraham Maslow would call "self-actualization" needs. When these needs were being met, it seems that other human needs such as the needs for physical survival and comfort, security and belonging needs, were not an issue. Yet when a woman had no opportunity in her workplace to participate in meaningful challenging purpose, neither the physical comfort nor the security of salary nor the community of warm friends around her could satiate the raw hunger that consumed her and eventually forced her to leave.

All the women in this study aspired to make a difference in the world through their work, to exert their labor in a special, meaningful way. They usually assume that they have the power of choice and the right to exercise this choice to invent work for themselves that makes a contribution. And the most frequently recurring theme of contribution was seeking ways of serving other people.

Choosing work that serves people

As continuous learners these women seemed to position themselves as servants to others, not as those to be served. Again and again I heard about the desire to help others, and particularly to help people into their own happiness. They might help others find happiness by alleviating their suffering, helping them find personal or collective power, or helping them connect with a transcendent vision. Those who enjoyed the excitement of new challenges and learning wanted others to share this abundance.

Kirsten loved to help people, to give them information. She was good at it, she could figure out what they really wanted to know, she could tell people things in a clear way so they could understand. They nodded as they listened to her, she knew they had connected to her words, they valued what she said. They valued her. Kirsten discovered through her work that she was good at helping people. She found this out early in her work experience when she was watching herself perform a variety of tasks, and delineating for herself, What sorts of activities am I "good at doing", when I compare me to other people? What activities give me pleasure? What activities am I not good at doing? Kirsten found her purpose, as resource-gatherer and communicator, through watching and assessing her everyday work.

Fran said she has "healing hands." She could always understand the people she nursed, even when they couldn't speak at all. Somehow . . . somehow she just knew their needs. They spoke to her through their eyes, or through their thoughts. Somehow. She knew when to rub, when to touch, when to be silent. Where did she learn this? She didn't know. "It comes with caring. You search to find whatever you can to relieve the pain because you really care. You really want to help. It is . . . your intention." Fran grew into her sense of purpose, as healer and nurturer of bodies and spirits, through her work.

"I have a need to help," Carolyn said.

> I'm not a psychologist but I want to help. I help them become aware -- help them see their options. I just keep searching for what works. I'll try different things. And then you listen to the people. You try to put yourself in their shoes. What do they actually know? How can I help them to believe in themselves? You listen. You don't always hear the full message . . . you colour it with your own beliefs.

Carolyn's stories showed that as her work as employee counselor and educator developed, she became increasingly aware of the importance of her role as a listener. Her own compulsion "to help" connected with their needs to be heard. She observed how the connection unfolded the people she worked with, in their confidence and energy. She saw over time how that connection stretched her world to enter theirs, and enriched her inner life with insights about herself and her relationships. The challenges of her job gradually transformed her into a continual listener, and uncovered a purpose which she uniquely could fill.

Sarah felt compelled in her work by the huge need of the youth ministers she served:

> Basically I'm a resource person for youth ministers. I love getting around and visiting the parishes, talking with the people. If you're going to minister to young people, you have to be a special kind of nut . . . They're fine, fine people. It's a difficult ministry and there's so much aloneness. There isn't really an awful lot of room or time to put energy

> into anything that isn't authentic. We deal with their issues. Hook people together, find whatever it is they need, share ideas, talk about problems. I've really learned to go with the flow and think on my feet. -- Sarah

She spoke from their perspectives; her intentions were projected into their needs. The tasks that had to be done unfolded and consumed her. She invented and experimented, and learned frantically to keep up with their need. Yet in subsuming her self and her purpose in serving their need, she found fulfillment. The energy generated through service fueled her own passion to learn what she had to create, and to learn by changing to accommodate to that which confronted her.

For Catherine, her purpose was compelling and pragmatic. She sought to sublimate her intense passion in action as an independent contractor that was creative and useful for others.

> I write this newsletter every month for my clients. Part of it is for me, my own learning. I read books every weekend then I sit down and write about them. Then my editor rips it all apart! But we get a superior newsletter. And I learn more. Look at this one that I'm reading right now, *The Web of Illusion*. It's a fantastic book. I use everything I learn right away.

Carla also described herself as a "pragmatist." Her sense of purpose and responsibility as a bank manager is strong in her description:

> I'm in charge of the bank to ensure that good customer service is provided. I'm responsible for the whole thing. I am in charge of all its assets and also of actuating certain growth standards of the bank. I must ensure that the branch is run to meet these detailed growth targets. I must account for all the dollars for the audit and control and security of the branch. Everything from the profits and losses to the stationery to the heating costs to the parking lot. Everything. -- Carla

Perhaps Liz's words best point out the underlying current in all these statements of purpose. "My purpose in this job is to listen to people and help them figure out what it is they need. But this job is just -- the form -- for meeting my needs. When I communicate with people, when it's clear, then I feel good. I feel very fulfilled in this job."

Whether an individual feels called, or invents, or discovers a purpose in work that for her has moral integrity, this purpose meets an essential human need: to exert effort through labor which was endowed with some meaning. When the labor connects with other people, to serve their needs, it becomes real and authentic. When the labor was creative, these women were engaged, stimulated, challenged. They were learning.

Choosing to aim for excellence

Their engagement in a task is directly proportional to how much they cared about its end result. A common theme among the women in this study was their preoccupation with excellence, or top quality, in everything they did. Denise left a computer software company when she discovered that the flagship income tax application plagued with unsolved buggy problems was being knowingly released for sales. "Top quality in my work is more than my value, it's what I need. . . I give 150%." Why? Denise is like Carla, who said, "I feel better when I put a lot of effort into my work. I have more energy." Elana was driven to do the "best possible job. I wanted to dazzle them, shower them with a package that was better than they expected, all those who resented me and distrusted me." Carla summed it up: "I hate the word 'satisfactory' -- I aim for excellence. It's got to be top quality or I'm just not satisfied. I want that from the people who work for me, too."

Some of the women recognized the unhealthy shadow cast by what they called their "perfectionism." Marilyn realized that it was this very push for doing "the best possible" that crumpled the "balance" between work and family and socializing and exercise in her life, and eventually landed her in deep stress. Although she was familiar with the signs and causes of the stress, and knew exactly what to do to play her own doctor, she was somehow unable to resist the inexorable seduction of the standards she'd set for herself as executive assistant to a well-known national politician. She felt herself begin to slide away from personal control, yet felt powerless to stop it. Liz recognized her "perfectionism" to have been instilled in her at an early age -- "I can hear my mother saying that you don't leave something until it's as good as you can do." Only later, after much personal reflection on her work patterns as a supervisor and in comparison to her core priorities and vision, was Liz able to make herself stop doing something when it's just "competent, not excellent, just -- good enough."

Wendy saw her own second-guessing of her consulting work as course developer and facilitator as a problem. She was never completely satisfied with her own work, and would continue to research and gather information for a course long after she sensed she really needed to. Her standard was the positive changes experienced by the people with whom she worked.

When purpose is blocked

Kirsten was calm but frustrated when she talked about intentions that couldn't materialize because of organizational constraints like changing agendas and territorial battles. Her stories from her work in various departments of the provincial government shared similar themes of projects choked mid-stream, or "put on the back-burner," or just plain dumped at the implementation stage. "I learned so much and I come up with another good idea, but they haven't been put into practice anywhere. They haven't materialized anywhere."

With a team of colleagues Kirsten spent several months interviewing government workers, then researching and preparing a project to meet the training and development needs of these workers. After much creative excitement, then revision, then long waits for approval at various levels of the organization the project finally died altogether.

> I've really learned that it doesn't matter where you are in larger organizations, nothing ever changes. You have these great plans to roll things out and things just never get off the ground. I've learned now to accept that as a kind of reality. And the exceptions are going to be the ones that actually get going.

Kirsten chaired a committee that worked out specific principles for a new program. The strategies were created, the handbook was developed to get the program into practice, the group was "quite gung-ho . . . "; then the department merged with another and the directive came to stop work on this project.

> I guess I learned not to be sometimes so . . . idealistic. You have to find a balance I guess between realizing that you've got contributions to make to

> the organization . . . at the same time to not think the initiatives you're working on are that important.

For a person to work and know that there may be no useful result of her labor; to create and know that her creation may vanish before life is breathed into it; to be denied importance for her work, is to be rendered bereft of intention. Kirsten learned not to be idealistic . . . she learned to distrust the power of ideas. When she finally realized that her projects, her labors, didn't have purpose, she accepted that she no longer had personal power of purpose. Assertive learning for her shut down, and avoidance learning became the lesson.

> It just gets to the point where you start feeling like the things you're doing are totally futile. It gets draining after awhile . . . .I've learned you have to cover your butt.

Seeking passion

"I have three needs, and the first one is passion." -- Liz

"I am intense, I'm passionate, about everything I do." -- Catherine

"What's my passion? That's what I ask myself -- that's what I'm looking for." -- Marilyn

Passion might be described as the energy of engagement, the spark of excitement, the momentum of commitment, the heat of moment-to-moment suspense and the charge of improvising in the dance of those moments. Passion is creating, feeling the power of generativity. Passion is also the low-key commitment to excellence, serving others' needs, and exemplifying integrity. Most of the women in this study sought to be passionately engaged in their work. Sometimes they looked for activities to do that would confront them with new demands which spark their passion, such as creative projects. Sometimes they sought other people who have that passion: Elizabeth said, "I like working with bright people, people that have that sparkle. When you do a project with people like that -- it's exciting, it's like being an artist."

Some could generate the energy themselves to confront experiences with passion. Liz said she needed "power, passion, and spontaneity":

> If I don't get it, I'll go out and create it. I've learned to label my experiences. I need to feel a sense of power, being in control of what's going on, shaping your environment. Things happen that you can't control. But I can feel powerful in the clothes I wear, in the way I set up my day. Passion you find everywhere, in the sunrise on your way to work, in the sparkle in some people's eyes . . . And when the phone rings and it's this girl from downstairs saying, "Let's get together for a chat," I drop everything, and say, Sure! See, it meets my need for spontaneity."

Zoe remembered her year of articling in a law firm as "ordeal by fire", left alone to make mistakes under the press of work, unadvised, and mostly ignored. Yet despite the miserable conditions, she entered the "stuff" of the job with enthusiasm: she looked with fascination at the different issues and contexts of each client's business. This "I want to learn" orientation doesn't rely upon the novelty of a particular idea or task. Janis learned, early in her career as a film-maker, the importance of manufacturing her own passion. Whether its mooseticks or grey alluvial soil, Janis says,

> Make it fascinating for yourself. Learn to "see" it freshly. Think of doing your work for the people who are excited by grey alluvial soil, mine deep, get up your energy to find it fascinating. Get excited about it.

Her creativity was the learning process in action. Women who sought to be passionately engaged in their work enjoyed a heightened state of awareness, an awakening from the lethargy of routine and the numbness of monolithic ideologies that Ralston Saul (1995) condemns as rendering late-20th century civilization "unconscious." Passion was the source of an energy to push forward into new landscapes, yanking women out of the morass of personal obsessions and learned helplessness that could entangle their visions, and propel them out of the limitations of the self's world into interconnection with the greater web of intersubjectivity.

In this study, women's stories of meaningful work and their concomitant workplace learning were often laced with passion. Tracing the roots of this passion, it appeared to develop from their deepest intentions governing the choices they made in work: choosing to find work that integrated their sense of personal moral purpose, choosing creative challenge and risk in work, and choosing to continue searching, to continue inquiring, and to continue seeking change.

Intention: Choosing to Continue Seeking in Work, Learning, and Life

> We're actually taking journeys all the time. A person can take a journey outward or a journey inward at nearly any time in adult life. Both journeys are circular and never-ending. Any journey of world-mastery inevitably impacts on the inner world. Likewise, any journey of ripening or deepening inevitably changes who one is in the day-to day world. Are these circular journeys? We end up where we started, but with a different perspective. Eventually there's another call to adventure. -- Janis

This is a simple but important dimension given the preoccupation in workplace and adult education literature with motivation of workers and learners. Wlodkowski's book (1986), as an example, is popular among North American adult educators and trainers: he shows adult educators techniques to stimulate the adult learner's *affect* , positive *attitudes*, and sense of *need*, then *reinforce* the learners' belief that they have achieved *competency*. Such devotion to the technology of creating and controlling a motivational state in the learner using behavioristic principles is rooted in two assumptions: one, that individuals can be described as "not motivated to learn" when their attention does not engage the experience that, according to the intentions of another authority, constitutes a "learning experience"; and two, that an "unmotivated" learner can and even should be somehow ignited and directed by another person's (the adult educator's) intentions into a learning process. The learner's own intentionality is presumed to be manipulable as a sort of fleeting state of emotional excitement. Worse, the learner's intentionality is not understood to be the window through which experience is apprehended, interpreted, and sometimes constituted as "learning". All understandings of experiential learning must be configured through the intentions formed in the individual's external world.

The women in this study showed that their learning in and through their work was often driven by their life intentions, in a much broader sense than the confines of a particular workplace experience or learning program. Life intentions embraced a sense of overall purpose or calling in their work, their point of caring or engagement in the work activity itself, and their personal needs as these drove what their search for personal meaning in work.

Intentions not only motivate, they constitute perceptions. Grumet (1992) explains that "whenever we speak of education, we are speaking of a person's experience in the world. Despite the unique specificity of each person's perspective, the intentionality of all conscious acts focuses our gaze upon some object, real or imagined" (p. 29). Merleau-Ponty (1962) claims that understanding is the harmony between intention and experience, and that intentions are the arc between an individual's perceptual field and the processes of coming-to-know. Seeking seemed to be different than pursuing a "goal" or following a "plan." Seeking was sometimes guided by a vision or a dream, sometimes by a sense of "trusting the process" and "being led" somewhere. The seeker was an inquirer of life, listening deeply to those experiences that seem to be part of the journey. The seeker was migratory, restless, desiring continuous change.

To depict a woman as "seeking" is to impose a quest archetype, which some might view as a 'grand narrative' (Lyotard, 1984) that is ultimately artificial and oppressive. 'Seeking' suggests certain connotations of the self-determined rugged individualist seeking self-actualization, certain assumptions that people can and should continuously grow, that life's project is one of continuously moving forwards, improving, progressing, and certain beliefs that life itself is a journey to somewhere, not here, but somewhere else -- here is just a place along the way to where I'm going. Life-as-perpetual-locomotion, whether in a spiral outwards or a straight line forwards or a steep climb upwards, denies or overlooks alternate paradigms of living grounded in stillness, or concentricity, or pendulum-rocking. The act of seeking is also the act of looking for something that was lost, implying that the seeker is in deficit, is in a condition of loss or less-than-whole. Said (1995) describes this condition positively, as continuous migration in which, incidentally, he finds humanity's hope for a way out of imperialistic structures.

Work emerged in these women's biographies to be central to their seekings -- more important to some in their journeying than their sense of place, their family, their spiritual faith, or their significant personal relationships. Work seemed to be far more important than recreation or leisure as a staff of life, the critical clay from which everyday life and its meaning are shaped. Work became an important background against which they foregrounded their identity, a crucial terrain upon which they mapped their journeys to seek meaning and self and connection in the world. Then where were these women going in/with their work? What were they seeking?

Giddens (1991) postulates that ontological security is the desired condition that all humans seek in a late modern age characterized chiefly by anxiety. He believes that an individual's reasons for action are largely created reflexively, to explain or justify behavior after the fact, pointing out that much routine behavior is not motivated but just carried on as elements of day-to-day life: "We should regard motivation as an underlying 'feeling-state' of the individual, involving unconscious forms of affect as well as more consciously experienced pangs or promptings" (Giddens, 1991, p. 64). These pangs, Giddens explains later, are essentially related to feelings of dread that behind the fragile yet seemingly sturdy facade of everyday life and routine lurks chaos and meaninglessness. Thus a person's intentions are "born of anxiety, coupled with the learning processes whereby a sense of ontological security is engendered" (p. 64).

If this is so, then individuals have little agency to create their lives except to either manufacture an illusory sense of security through compliance with routinized structures, or developing a narrative ascribing intention to their lived histories. And according to Giddens, these actions are at least partly understood as responses to general anxiety.

Such an attenuated view of self is not confirmed by the self-understandings of these women. Although they spoke at length about the process of the journey, the stopping points and decisions that lead to transitions, and particularly about their feelings along the way, there was little preoccupation with actual destinations. Not only did they not actively seek security or certainty; but they fled from work activity, contextual conditions or personal perspectives that locked them into ontological security. Whenever they reached places offering such security, they obsessed about sinking into personal stagnancy and complacency. They hungered for the energy of motion, of continual challenge, of newness. They longed to migrate, not nest.

Sustaining and making sense of continuous searching as a life intention

Women talked about sustaining the process of the search itself, of continuous journeying, and exploring. As they moved forward they were conscious of carrying with them and periodically making sense of the places they had been, the experiences they had lived. Keep the needle moving. Here's a new bright square. Does it fit? Stitch it in. The motive to reflect on their own seeking seemed to come from an urge to make sense of the pattern emerging in the quilt of their work that they had stitched together so far. Bateson (1990) describes contemporary women's lives as an improvisatory art, "in which commitments are continually refocused and redefined" (p. 9) and where "fluidity and discontinuity are central" (p. 13). Women don't fit the old quest archetype where energies are focused upon a single ambition; instead, "multiple commitments and multiple beginnings [create] an emerging pattern. . . .an individual work of art. . . parables in process" (p. 16-17).

If the women found themselves functioning in a job that was not fulfilling a unique purpose or expressing their creative energy, many of them assumed that the opportunity for such a job would come soon -- and they continued to seek it. Often I heard women say, sometimes with a slight embarrassed sense of self-amusement, "I guess I still haven't decided what I want to be when I grow up." And still they felt compelled to seek this purpose -- whatever it might prove to be. Persephone said to me at one point, "I went to a workshop on the weekend that labeled me a 'questor'. I felt so relieved! All my life I thought I was just easily dissatisfied." Persephone's work history was a patchwork of beads, spaces and positions, that she had collected on the string of her career life in her continuous search.

This process, what Fran calls "quilting her self", is what some theorists insist is a process of constructing a personal narrative. Giddens (1991) writes that self-identity presumes a narrative. Our compulsion to construct a coherent self drives us to discern a trajectory of development from our own past to our anticipated future in a reflexive project that is internally referential: the only significant connecting thread for our identity and our experiences is our life trajectory itself (pp. 74-80). Polkinghorne (1988) believes that the concept of self is a constantly changing synthesis of other people's responses and attitudes into a single story:

> . . . we achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipation of what one will be. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150).

What women do not seek in work

Despite an apparent prevailing belief in corporate worlds that human beings are motivated by the beckoning ladder of status and salary, what Borgmann (1995) refers to as the modern individual's search for commodious gain, such symbols of "success" appeared to have little meaning for the women I interviewed in this study . Their work stories carried few allusions that could be interpreted as desire for territory, comfort, or material gain. In fact, many of their choices deliberately veered away from these commodities. Many of the women chose to change careers rather than remain in a comfortable position of increasing promotions, guaranteed salary and familiar routine. Many stated at some point that the last thing they care about is making money in excess of what they require to survive with relative security -- not luxury. "In all the jobs I've had, I've never made much money. And I never will. I make different choices", said Persephone. Elana said, "I don't like to buy things, I don't really think about money." Audrey made a deliberate career choice, leading workshops and developing materials, that provided a third of her former salary in the real estate business. "I'm more relaxed now, it works for me."

Workplace learning and the intention of seeking

Intentions are compelled by needs. Taubman (1992) explains how Lacan's (1972) conceptualization of intention concludes that because our intentions emerge in our words as "demands" which cannot quite articulate the originary needs, our demands actually create an excess, a pre-articulated or left-over need that continues to seep unsated. We understand this excess, says Lacan, as our "desires." Using Lacan's principles to understand a teacher's relationship to knowledge and to the learner, Taubman (1992) summarizes his ideas in a way that can be illuminating to understand a learner's relationship to knowledge and to her work. So where Taubman has used the word "teacher" I have substituted the word "learner" to show the relevance of his point to this study more clearly: "The articulated demand colonizes, reshapes, and squeezes the need. . . . The question is how to move back through the *learner* 's demand or intention to the need and thus understand the *learner* 's desire. . . .The desire of the *learner* then is for more knowledge that remains always external to *her* but onto which *she* tries to collapse *herself* " (p. 234).

Needs function to structure the way women go about doing their work, which shaped their work experiences and thus the raw curriculum for their learning. Every woman spoke powerfully about needs that they had discovered could be met through their work. Certain needs were echoed again and again, that become sublimated into a continuing search: the need to achieve excellence, the need for engagement, the need for connection with others, and the need for new challenge that comes with change. All of these needs were fundamental to a sense of well-being, and all drove the compulsion to learn.

Intentions driven by an individual's sense of need not only motivate learning, but also constitute perceptions. Grumet (1992) explains that "whenever we speak of education, we are speaking of a person's experience in the world. Despite the unique specificity of each person's perspective, the intentionality of all conscious acts focuses our gaze upon some object, real or imagined" (p. 29). Merleau-Ponty (1962) claims that understanding is the harmony between intention and experience, and that intentions are the arc between an individual's perceptual field and the processes of coming-to-know.

For these women, the processes of coming-to-know seemed to be compelled not by desire for power and knowledge as commodities, but for the freedom to continue seeking. These women apparently weren't easily persuaded to stop and consolidate what had evolved so far in their work history because they were hungry to keep moving, to sail to the next port, and the next and the next.

Chapter 6

Disjuncture: Interrupting and Awakening

In the women's stories, the second significant dimension characterizing their engagement in workplace learning was disjuncture. This chapter describes themes of disjuncture as it appeared in the women's narrations, then explores this concept in terms of related literature.

Disjuncture in Workplace Learning

A "disjuncture" may be thought of as a realization, a moment when the learners perceive a gap between past biography, and the experience in which they find themselves acting. Disjuncture means to separate, to part. Something that once had unity suddenly does not. In the flow of ordinary work the individual may experience a dilemma requiring decision, an irregularity, a piece of information that is incongruent with previous understandings, a surprising outcome, a problem the individual may fervently wish to eliminate. A disjuncture produces a tension, a dissonance. If this dissonance prompts a question that matters to the individual, and if the choice is made to open up and pursue that question, the individual will be led into a learning process. Marilyn described how the disjuncture between what she knew and what confronted her inspired her to make sense of it:

> I had gone in to the roundtables with my agenda, my white western agenda -- results-oriented success. This year I asked an aboriginal woman to facilitate. The elder began with a prayer, then the woman talked, and talked -- for fifteen minutes! -- about her life story. You know, the highlights would've been fine, but we got the whole thing. Then she lit sweetgrass --in the middle of this corporate office, sweetgrass! -- and then blessed the talking stick, it was a beautifully decorated talking stick, and she talked of listening, and of the patience to really listen to each other. And my partner Barney is going crazy -- you've got to stop her! She'll set off the smoke alarms! We've got people catching planes in four hours, we've got to put them in their small groups, NOW. And I said, no, Barney, we can't stop this thing, don't you see what's happening? And she set up such a chain of trust that people began to share, and they took the talking stick and shared things, very personal things. When the vice-president of [a major bank] took the stick, he said, "Mark this day, this is a special day." And about a third of the way through I began to relax, and I realized that this was so much more powerful than anything we could have dreamed, I knew I was learning something very important.

The work-learning histories of the women in this study indicated the importance not only of the type of disjuncture and its circumstances in their experiential workplace learning, but also their attitude to the disjuncturing presence in their worlds of meaning, and their strategies for coping with the dissonance. Mistakes and failures were not necessarily the rich sources of learning that workplace literature maintains. Instead, women's stories of workplace learning were typically marked by a celebration of success or a confirmation of themselves as competent and knowing. Even when a meaning struggle ensues from a disjuncture, women described times of learning as those where eventual confirmation and development, not destruction or overturning, of deep belief systems is achieved.

In the following sections of this chapter, four main themes of these women's experiences with disjuncture will be discussed: (1) how some of these women themselves actively create disjunctures that cause their learning, (2) how some learn through disjuncture created through their reflection on experience, (3) how many of these women use specific strategies to help themselves cope with the stress of disjuncture, and (4) how most of these women choose a personal stance to any disjuncture, a stance which significantly influences what is learned.

Choosing to create disjuncture

The women in this study described themselves as "continuous learners." They also were each selected for participation in this study because they had demonstrated career resilience and ability to thrive on major changes in the nature of their work and their workplaces. These are important characteristics to remember when reading the following section, which describes how some of these women deliberately induce disequilibrium in their daily lives and work. These women seem to be highly proactive, unusually alert, resourceful people who have the uncommon ability to view their worlds with fresh, questioning wonder. The sub-themes of this section show how these women created disjuncture in their work through a perspective of keen, questioning attendance: actively listening for discrepancy, becoming "awake" to their worlds by slowing down to attend to the moment, seeing their worlds "slant" by asking why questions, and seeking alternate perspectives by listening to other points of view. They also induced disjuncture by stepping out: taking risks and trying challenging projects.

Listening for discrepancy

With many of the women I spoke to, intuition alerted them to a sense of something not fitting. Liz said, "Work is going, it's flowing. The minute that something doesn't flow -- it doesn't fit. It's wrong." She told a story of negotiating with a Calgary office of her company, which wanted a word processing program. But even over the telephone, deprived of the complex signals of nonverbal conversation which often give us those hard-to-describe hunches about people, Liz sensed that something just didn't quite -- fit. So she asked more questions, trying to uncover their thinking in Calgary: what would they use it for? who would use it? All the while she's speculating, interpreting to story the gaps that will create an explanation that fits true against all the signals she's reading from the experience: Maybe what they need is . . . ? Maybe they've been talking to somebody who . . . ? Even now she struggled against the limits of words and linear language to articulate for me the multi-dimensional thinking that transpired in the few minutes of that telephone call. Ultimately she did find that the program was the wrong choice and the wrong people were involved. Liz says, "My intuition will lead me to the next step. I pay attention to my intuition. I just -- know -- something. Then I check it out."

Kirsten often told stories analysing communicative issues that she struggled to make sense of in different organizations, often large public-sector bureaucracies. She evidently discussed some of these with co-workers, but didn't always receive support or acknowledgment of the issue she was raising:

> This was one of my pet theories, and some people actually believed me on this. There was physically a wall right smack down the middle of the office . . . and the HR advisors were over here, and the employment

> development advisors were over here. We couldn't see each other unless we physically walked over to the other side of the office. So to me that created a psychological wall or an emotional barrier. So, a lot of competition happens just because we really didn't have a lot to do with them on a day-to-day basis.

These three stories showing disjuncture experienced inside an organization and outside, with colleagues and with clients, all illustrate a common theme in almost all of the disjuncture experiences told to me by these women. The disjuncture that was felt most keenly and responded to most strongly was interpersonal and communicative in nature. When the women talked about something not "fitting", they were referring to an awkwardness between people, a little logjam in the flow of rapport, a whiff of unexpected emotion, an omission of some small nicety of behavior that social norms dictated, the chill of distance, or just an unexplained sense that all was not well in the relationship. To apprehend such a disjuncture, a woman needs to be attuned to people, aware of the possibilities of interconnectedness, and feel responsible for nurturing these connections. Fran stressed her development of empathy for others as one of her most valuable knowings: "When you care about people, really care. You can feel what they think, without talking."

Becoming awake: Slowing down to attend to the moment

A common theme among women who learned continuously through their work was their attention to the here-and-now. In the previous chapter were examples of women who sought challenge in their worlds by rousing their own curiosity like Janis the film-maker, who taught herself how to "see things freshly, make them fascinating." This ability combined the cultivated patience of stillness and waiting, but also a heightened awakening to the rich details of life around them.

Janis's words sang in my mind the morning Fran told me about the turning point in her attitude to the farm she and her husband had purchased. Fran had been morose and had fled to the city whenever she could, until Bertha came to work for them. Bertha took Fran on walks. That was all. "I learned to see," said Fran simply. Elana said, "I learn when I go to meetings. I listen to others. I watch the way people do their work. I can model their behavior. If I see someone who is effective in facilitating a group I may just absorb a couple of the things I see."

Patience and attentiveness are part of wakefulness. An appreciation for new things also influences learners either to perceive their world freshly, or to create the newness that awakens their perceptions. This was why Catherine said, "I never teach something the same way twice. I'm always trying something new, experimenting." Attentiveness and openness to new possibilities alerts an individual to possible new role models. Like Liz, who met people at a seminar for personal excellence and said, " I want to be like that. I want that sparkle."

The other part of wakefulness was intentionally slowing down the hyperactive pace of the corporate workplace. Marilyn appeared to be enjoying a whole period of life where she was newly appreciating the value of peace, of richer experience at a slower tempo in her work, and tasting the sharp tang of learning disjunctures that wakefulness brings. One evening she was giddy with pleasure at the success of a series of focus groups she'd just finished facilitating for a large non-profit recreational agency. She'd slowed down in the group discussions, focused on "the process" of the group interaction instead of rushing headlong toward the product. What happened was playful, rich conversation. In Marilyn's story at the beginning of this chapter of the round-table sessions, she showed how when time stopped, listening with wakefulness began, and hurried people opened to each other for the first time.

Stepping out: Taking risks and trying projects

"I feel sorry for people who don't have the courage to -- taste life." -- Marilyn

What sparks people to step outside of their comfortable roles in their work and stick out their necks? What is the appeal in taking on a new project that may force them to act without relevant know-how, that may lead them through the valley of humiliating public mistakes, that forces them to clothe themselves in a role that may pinch and scratch, that necessitates making sense of an unfamiliar language, new concepts, new rules and relationships? When Persephone took on leadership of a religious women's organization, she was just at a point where she said:

> I wanted to grow myself, spiritually. I wanted to do this desperately but I thought, I don't know enough about my faith to be a leader. But I also thought, this is going to force me to do more reading, more exploring, come up with some creative symbols, expressions, some ways to do things better than our past leaders who would just read to us. My goal was to involve as many people as possible at each meeting. What can I do that everybody's going to take part in?

The urge to seek the adventure of risk, to hurl oneself into new projects, becomes tempered over time as women come to understand the workworld and its potential to destroy them. "I hate to pass up a learning opportunity, and work is learning," said Janis. But as she became more experienced in her field, she recognized the way youthful enthusiasm for learning and working "flat out" was taken advantage of by a hungry and poorly funded film industry. She suffered burn-out on one project and a debilitating physical illness after a lengthy period of hyperactivity. So learned to pick projects carefully. She wouldn't do anything that didn't have some new-ness about it. She wouldn't do "grunt work", spinning out her skills for someone who needed them, except a favors for friends. And she wouldn't commit herself to a project unless she could create that energy that would sustain her through the hard labor.

New projects present opportunity for new risks, new challenges, new learning. A common characteristic of these women was apparently the propensity to "say yes", like Wendy. When I asked how she chooses her contract work, Wendy almost whispered with a low intensity, "I *never* turn down work." But the last time I spoke with her, she had just withdrawn from one-half of a yearly contract with one client. This was a painful decision that she still hadn't reconciled, judging by her copious explanations of its process. The story was that through the years Wendy has bent flexibly to accommodate the agency who hired her to develop and run career development workshops for a particularly difficult group of clients, until finally Wendy realized she was tired and hurting from the experiences and needed a break. It had been the first time Wendy had made a request -- to be assigned to a more reasonable and rewarding client group. Her request was flatly refused. It dawned on her that "I was low person on the pole," a startling discovery when she'd been working under a service ethic of building community in which she didn't realize there was a pole.

If the bright side of risk-taking in the workplace was adventure and learning possibilities, the dark side was the personal suffering entailed by defeat, error, or failure. Somehow this was not the key issue, although these women experienced what others might call defeat, error, or failure. Marilyn mentioned her defeat in the federal election almost in passing as part of a larger story about discovering the kind of support people were willing to give her, and needing to recuperate after the tremendous output of energy required to sustain the campaign. For these women, the personal costs incurred by the kinds of risk-taking they ventured in the workplace, costs which they eventually learn to protect themselves against, seemed to be depletion of their personal resources such as health, energy, and capacity for caring, and rupture of rapport with others.

Seeing it "slant": Asking why questions

> I was always interested in the "why." My husband says I always want to know more . . . . After each training session we look at the evaluations the participants do. The question is, Why did this person say this workshop changed their whole life? Why is what this person experienced different than the others? What does this tell us? -- Carolyn

The ability to ask "why" questions depends first on the capacity to notice things. Carolyn saw the details of the ordinary in extraordinary ways. She saw the general patterns and was alert to discrepancies. She was sensitive to the nagging itch of something not fitting. Her will to ask, "But . . . why?" was a commitment to pursue the inquiry, to probe the gaps and silences. Marilyn explained:

> It's so basic to me. I have a "Request for Proposal" here asking for a public consultation process. I'm reading the terms of reference and they say, 'talk to women'. Immediately I'm asking, is this the best way to do this? Why aren't we talking to the men the women are supposed to influence? Why aren't we talking to the people who don't influence government? You never accept anything as it is. You're questioning all the time.

Questioning is the art of making the familiar strange. It begins with close scrutiny: to look, then look again. Janis learned this in making her first documentary: "It was as if I was seeing things for the first time, seeing them in new color and intensity." But asking why questions in the workplace can lead to pain. Elizabeth said, "A lot of people don't ask themselves questions. I ask why, or I ask to clarify my understanding, but then I get involved in this discussion which is sometimes win-lose." Sometimes other people don't know the answers to the why questions. And people are usually not grateful to someone for pointing out things they don't know. Kirsten was pleased when her manager thanked her for pointing out how his communication style was alienating some staff. She was scared to do so, and wondered whether her perceptions were reliable -- maybe his own directive style was more effective than what she would have preferred, and staff should adjust accordingly. But the manager altered his manner, and relationships improved around the office. Since then, Kirsten said she experimented with asking "those sorts of questions," the ones where she was things from a different angle and voiced her perspective. But Kirsten was also wary, observing others closely and learning their lessons. One of her co-workers is,

> very direct, very blunt. The way she asks questions sometimes puts people off -- and she's not attacking, but she's saying, Have you thought of this? She just wants to get it out and get it discussed. You can tell that inside, it's really stressing her. -- Kirsten

Catherine finally left organizational life to start her own consulting firm. "I get so fed up with the regulations", she explains. "I ask, why do we have to do it this way? What are the assumptions here? I'm a problem solver, I find answers. I see the situation without the problem. Every time I do something it's different, my need to continuously improve."

Although Carla had always asked questions to challenge her own strategies. She moved from asking herself, "How do I do this?" when starting to manage a bank branch to, "How else can I do this?" after constructing a foundation of knowledge through a few years' experience. Then she found herself asking the critical questions of "Why are things run this way?" when she became a shareholder in the bank. She was not entirely happy with the way Instabank was protecting the bank's interests, had noted some deficiencies in general procedure and raised questions with head office about introducing a new computer system. In other words, she was seeing even more of the taken-for-granted details and she willingly turned them on their sides to create a disjuncture.

Seeking alternate perspectives: Listening to other points of view

When Persephone managed the jewelry store, people would come in and never buy a thing. Some would have no money at all, but people would come just to talk. Eventually she put out a coffee pot and two chairs. What did she do to invite this level of trust that encouraged people to share their points of view on the world? "You don't have to say a lot, but you make a connection," said Persephone. "You say, 'I've had a similar experience', and you listen. You learn so much about people's lives. You come to understand things more."

When she opened herself to others' stories, she risked hearing beliefs that challenged her own, experiences that didn't match hers, reminders that her thinking was limited or impractical, that her decisions were not as good as she thought, that other people may be more worthy or know more or do better than she. When people seek these others' stories and wisdom, if they deliberately make themselves vulnerable to these reminders of their own limitations, they are either very strong and brave, or they want learning more than they want the comfort of believing in the infallibility of their own knowings.

Nancy relied on certain resource people who periodically visited her community development center to give her feedback, a different perspective to her own, a perspective that often prompted a disjuncture:

> I ask them, 'What do you see happen here?' Because I can't see it for myself. I tell them a story, ask 'What would be your impression?' Is there another side I'm not seeing or hearing? Some people are very astute that way. They can say, 'Have you looked at this? Have you thought about that?'

Many of these women not only assertively and actively sought other points of view, they also developed strategies enabling them to accept into themselves these different perspectives. Liz understood her natural defensive responses to opinions different from her own, and worked to deliberately step outside these responses. She admitted that it was uncomfortable to be open to feedback: "I don't like to hear the negative, right? Obviously, it's nicer to hear the positives. But if it's all positive I don't know where to target how I can improve. It's important to really listen to that feedback, and internalize it." But Liz worked on building her own self-confidence, taking on responsibility at work and worrying more about caring for other people than competing with them.

Catherine gathered around her a circle of people chosen for their distinctly different ways of viewing the world. She tested any new ideas she had by running it through their perspectives. She tested new workshop activities among a group of friends and clients -- her "learning circle" -- who showed and told her what was useful and what was lousy. She sought and welcomed opinions from colleagues that questioned her private ways of thinking and working. She didn't seem to want personal approval and affirmation as much as she wanted personal challenge and confrontation.

Choosing to reflect on experience

> We had what were called "well baby clinics." I hate the name, but that's what they were called. People would bring their kids in to get immunized. So they would come for the needle -- but what we would give them was counseling. Whether they wanted it or not. So for instance, the appointment would start with lots of questions -- how old is your baby, weight, etc. Then we would give the mom information -- nutrition, safety, you name it. But the needle didn't come until the end. They would be baffled sometimes -- this is all well and good, but when's the needle part? It was like, I'll give you a treat but first you've got to hear the story.
>
> I began to see an ethical problem. People weren't being offered the choice. We weren't treating them as adults -- we were imposing the information on them whether they wanted it or not. We had an agenda, a lesson plan, that wasn't being shared with them. I thought, what am I hiding here? Besides, the information was standardized. You told them certain things for a two-month old, a four-month old, and so on. As I think about it now, in light of some of the adult education courses I've taken, I think, good grief! The information was delivered with no attention to different people's learning styles. It was all verbal, and written information in pamphlets. What about people who can't absorb information by listening to it? Or who can't read? But I didn't know these things then, I was ignorant. But the least we could have done was make them aware of the information sources available, suggested various things they could find out if they wanted. But always, to give them the choice. -- Nancy

Nancy's story shows the process of discerning a disjuncture, a weakness in her fabric of knowledge that came apart when she identified the disjuncture. Two things seemed to characterize Nancy's approach to her work which had been partly developed in her previous experiences working with a "maverick" group of dedicated nurses: first, her intentions were to serve, and care deeply for the dignity and understanding of a patient-client above all; and second, she was intrepid in confronting taken-for-granted practice and values comprising the status quo. Who knows what first alerted her attention to a patient's bafflement? But when she followed the light that streamed through the crack in the ordinariness of the clinic, proceeding according to regulation, new questions blossomed quickly into a whole new meaning structure for which she now had to take responsibility. She began to think that the standard procedures may be wrong, and contravened beliefs that were basic to her sense of identity as a professional nurse. She wondered if she should act, and if so, how she should act.

> I tried to get people on side with my issue. I couldn't talk to clients about it, of course, but I'd talk to friends of mine who were moms. Other nurses at Eastwood didn't see it as a big problem. Certainly the status quo was to keep the well-baby clinics going, not to change them. And

> anyhow, my big interest at the time was school health. This was a peripheral issue. When I discussed it with my supervisor, she supported my changing my own strategy. Which I did, so that when I sat down with a client I'd explain the procedures of questioning, counseling, followed finally by the needle -- and ask them if that was okay. At least I was making my agenda clear to them. I dropped the issue of trying to change the clinic's operations.

Women in this study demonstrated that disjuncture leading to learning was often opened for them through their own reflections. Reflection was complex and unfolds in myriads of ways. Many stories of reflection that women narrated were generated by communicative encounters that pushed open issues of identity or ethics.

Reflecting retrospectively: Replaying the "dailies"

"Dailies" are the sum total of a day's filmed footage that are reviewed each night by the directorial staff of a film production. Like some of the other women in this study, Nancy found herself sometimes awake late into the night thinking about work -- replaying conversations, predicting and planning ahead to prepare for the next day. Her job as director of a community development agency was a new one, presenting her simultaneously with many new situations to make sense of and take action on:

> If something goes wrong that really impresses itself on me. Why did this go wrong? I'll remember those things. But things that go well are nice fuzzy warm memories -- it's harder to recall them and to bring forward what contributed to that success.

Kirsten said that when she got compliments on her work, she was amazed at her tendency to "almost . . . slack off, get a little complacent." Disjunctures on the other hand have jagged edges that pierce the seamless grey reality of worklife. Disjunctures penetrate the tendency to otherwise sail blithely through everyday work activity. For these women, disjunctures almost always were framed in human relationships and communicative interactions. The jagged edges were the emotional hurts, niggling anxieties, and little guilts that marred the sense of a relationship where understanding flowed and mutual caring attended one to the other, forgiving the tiny thoughtless details of bumbling human behavior.

Sarah's description of two different bosses was an example. One was a woman, and Sarah remembers lots of talk between this boss and the other women of the office -- quick exchanges of laughter, stories of family, naming feelings, as well as sharing project and policy information and asking for advice, offering help. The flow of talk -- personal, relational, creative planning and informational -- maintained the warmth and rapport that bonded the individuals. The three women in the office Sarah described were, she says, a truly collaborative team. Then the woman was replaced by a man. Here was a different "work style": solitary, impatient with talk, inclined to divide up the work and allow everyone to get on with productivity. Sarah felt cut off, isolated, alone and uncertain. "All I want to know is, have the rules of the game changed?" she asked somewhat bitterly.

In periods of reflection, it seemed to be relational signals that many of these women attended to carefully. Carolyn, for example, replayed her discussion seminars in her imagination on her way home. Why did he look at me like that when I answered his question? Why does she cover her mouth with her hand? The signals are analysed:

what's the message? what's the meaning implicitly embedded in this message? what does this mean for me?

Owning mistakes: Learning when things go wrong

Disjuncture sometimes opens learning opportunities in painful ways:

> I was teaching a pre-natal course, and mid-way through the course I asked everyone for a course evaluation. Well, it was pretty devastating. I was traumatized. People were very honest, and basically said that the classes weren't meeting their needs at all. The course was a flop. I thought, this is awful! These people are almost ready to have their babies and I'm not helping them at all! I also thought, that was pretty gutsy for them, saying what they really thought. Fortunately they all came back to class and we talked about it. I looked at what I was doing and thought, what can I do to change this? I brought in a mom and interviewed her. I had another mom demonstrate baby care with her own child and in the end the course turned out to be a positive experience. I learned from this that you need to check in with learners. You have to involve them in planning the program. You have to give them choices.

Nancy's story demonstrates several dimensions worth noting about disjuncture and learning. First was her invitation for evaluation, an action that not all instructors are confident and willing to do except when forced. Whatever she was expecting, her reaction of "trauma" indicates that her picture of the class experiences and the learners' views were very different realities. The evaluations jarred her own reality -- and at this point she had to choose. Would she protect her own self-image by judging the learners as having a distorted sense of what really happened, or would she trust their views as worthy of attention? Although feeling hurt, Nancy did not necessarily believe her identity was being judged as insufficient or wrong -- only her actions. Although as teacher and nurse her position was to have been "expert", she adopted the humbler position of the learning attitude, acknowledging that her choice of action was wrong for this context, and thus was able to open her reality to listen to and fold within herself the dissonance from the realities of others. Both her intentions and her positionality affected her response to the disjuncture -- her intention to serve -- thus she positioned herself to the others as servant, not as one-being-served. She sought overall not to save face or to enjoy the self-serving satisfaction of delivering what she could insulate herself into believing were excellent classes, but rather to serve the pregnant women, by helping to prepare for a difficult task. Spiraling outwards from the strategic instrumental learning of this incident -- how to design programs that help pregnant women -- she allowed the entire incident to penetrate and unstabilize her existing knowledge about program planning, and about her position respective to learners. Again her sense of self was not in question, rather her beliefs about instrumental practice and her functions in the practice world. That her learning from this incident was internalized and became permanently woven into the fabric of the knowledge that guided her actual practice became clear in a later story Nancy told:

> I try to think of myself in the learner's position when I'm planning. How do you make the learning experience relevant and meaningful to them? Recently there was an initiative to plan grade nine immunization. A committee had been struck, but no one thought to include grade nine students and their parents. They hadn't even thought of it. If I were doing it I might only have grade nine students. I can represent the establishment quite competently, all by myself. The important thing is what are their

> concerns, their feelings? If you don't involve them, you're imposing your own agenda on their needs.

Reflection is withdrawal, said Carolyn. While she was with people, she stayed "with the moment", immersed in here-and-now intersubjectivity, engaged in the other's reality allowing herself to be woven into the skeins of meaning webbing herself and the others. Emotional triggers may have helped her note images and scenes that she could later treat as freeze-frames in the action to study at leisure: "Why did this happen? Why did I make that choice? Why does what that person think matter? How did I impact so-and-so?" But such reflection breaks the bonds of commitment of self to the moment and its demands for action, bonds that ground us in the world unfolding around and through us.

Nancy needed "quiet, absolute quiet. At midnight things will come into my mind, when I'm by myself. I will not be able to go to sleep because I'll be reviewing." This kind of reflective reviewing was a mainstay of Carolyn's practice. In trying to analyse her reflective process, she explained that reflection was always a "set-aside activity", something that occurred in private quiet after an experience where she had to perform in interactions with others (such as leading a workshop or participating in a meeting). She realized that while in the "thick" of action there was now and then what she described as a "jolt", an awareness of what she interpreted to be an important signal outside herself that was unexpected or troubling -- a participant frowned in a workshop, a dialogue erupted in a surprising way. She said her emotion was her primary sense in such interactions -- when she felt a strong emotional response to an occurrence, whether fearful anxiety or pleasurable excitement, the emotion helped anchor and record the signal for later reviewing. But she definitely set aside whatever temptation there may have been to stop and take time to make sense of this troubling signal "in-action."

Liz said that the older she gets, the more time she was taking for reflection, and the more generally comfortable she felt with her work, even though the level of stress implicit in the action hadn't changed. She observed:

> One of my learnings lately has been that a person just needs time. Blank time. Think time. And not always being so busy that you don't have time for your thoughts. When I was too busy doing things externally, I wasn't doing things internally. Now I make time to think back over my life. Where have I come from? How did I get there? Why do I think the way I do now? The better I feel spiritually and emotionally, the better it gets at work. I'm so calm.

Critical reflection and self-assessment: Transformative learning

Kirsten said, "I stop and think about things . . . stand apart and look at myself and see what I'm doing. Looking at something I do and say, 'That's weird.' I don't do it perfectly all the time. (Pause). My husband tells me things that I miss."

The word assess comes from the Latin for "to sit beside." Self-assessment, the activity of reflection on work, demands that a woman sit beside her self.

Although many of the women in this study described periods of their lives where they experienced such ruptures and consequent suspicion of their previously unquestioned meaning structures, their activity in the workplace rarely seemed to provoke this sort of reflection on premise, or transformative learning. Stories of reflection on premise came from personal crises, or most commonly, from transformative classroom experiences in formal adult education learning situations such as college or university courses, or personal development workshops. For example, Sarah told of a participatory, intensive formal course where first she realized that Scripture could be interpreted as if it were literature: "it was like everything I had believed cracked wide open." Fran told of a graduate-level university course she recently completed in feminist ecology ("Feminist ecology? I thought at first, what is *that* ? I certainly didn't see myself as a feminist"). In the course, the new ways of seeing she learned through readings and discussion virtually ruptured her world, her sense of her marriage, her view of her former self as a nurse in the traditional hospital patriarchy, and her vision of what made a just future.

The kind of reflection on workplace events and conditions in which these women seemed to participate most frequently was reflection on process: mentally re-running a scene in which they had acted, interpreting the responses of people around them, and assessing what worked and what didn't. This prominence of process assessment during reflection on work experiences may indicate the instrumental emphasis in so many workplaces. The search is often for best strategy, the end is practical utility, and the knowledge most valued is what Habermas (1984) would call "technical." Rarely did these women talk about reviewing what they had done well, either to remember a particular strategy or to congratulate themselves on a job well done.

When 'reflecting' becomes 'second guessing'

One of the dangers of self-assessing reflection is the tendency to become self-critical. These women called this, "second-guessing." They claimed that their predilection to scourge themselves by second-guessing their work performance came from two sources: their perfectionist leanings, and their tendency to compare themselves and their own ways of working to others'. They found themselves continually assessing, searching for standards against which to measure their performance.

As an independent contractor, Wendy knew what to charge and had a sense of what her competitors offered. But she worried and wondered about how her working process stacks up against others': "How long should it take to develop a three-day workshop? And what is billable? How many hours of research? I think there's something wrong with the way I'm doing this. It shouldn't take this long." She didn't trust her own criteria for structuring her work and assessing her performance.

More frequently and more poignantly, the women's reflections focused on what they did that they shouldn't have done, or what they didn't do that they should have done. This sort of negative reviewing was termed by several to be "second-guessing", a habit they felt wasn't always productive. All told stories about reviewing what they did, sometimes as though viewing old films. As they watched and listened to these mental films play they were attending chiefly to themselves, as performers -- as though their actions in the workplace were a kind of drama. Wendy, like Liz, Elana, and Elizabeth, felt that her work was never quite good enough. "This is the perfectionist streak in me", said Wendy. "I don't often ask, how did I do it well? I guess I should. But I'm always second-guessing. I'm very poor about making decisions -- nothing seems good enough. Bottom line is I don't believe in anything I develop. When I put it on paper it's me, what I have deemed important. It's sticking your neck out." Although she was aware of her second-guessing as an obstacle, and although she could refer to countless examples of her work that had been praised or proven effective, she seemed powerless to really change her habits of reflecting by herself. "I believe people can change. But when something is so deeply ingrained -- I've worked at it in bits and starts." A difference occurred when she completed a project with a task-oriented friend, who would seize an idea offered by Wendy and immediately pin it down -- "Okay, this is good! Let's use this." Wendy would be surprised and wary -- "We should look at other possibilities first" -- then realize that what her friend was shaping from her own idea was very good, would work just fine. And that was a learning for Wendy: "Hey, I do have some good ideas! I don't need to go around in circles always, always second-guessing." But even with the realization, Wendy knew that on her own next project she would still be questioning herself.

But the women indicated that the very issue of "second-guessing" -- reflection that became debilitatingly self-critical -- was a focus for their own critical reflection. Wendy knew she worried too much about her quality of work, "but I'm working on it -- some things are slow to change in yourself."

Liz permitted herself a sort of learning mode, when she was entering a new job or trying out new things. She expected herself to make mistakes, and knew she would realize better ways of doing things later, in hindsight. But she also had high expectations of herself in those areas "that I should already know how to do." She also regretted her "perfectionism", a characteristic she traced to early training from her mother: always do the best job possible. Liz was only now starting to work on changing this belief, by labeling those work tasks that did not need to be completed perfectly, just satisfactorily. But like Carla, who said she hated the word "satisfactory", and Wendy, who said she dreaded being thought of as "inadequate", Liz was having a hard time continually measuring herself against her own high standards.

Nancy described how standards for measuring your own work performance change over time: "As my base of knowledge grew, then I had less excuse to make these mistakes. When you're young, you make mistakes you kind of expect to. Now . . . I should know better. So let's look back on it. Let's see what didn't work, what did we learn from that."

Elizabeth said, "I ask myself too many questions. And I think . . . it's a self-defeating behavior that doesn't get you anywhere. People that are successful always sound like they know what they're doing." She said she often finds herself comparing her own performance, or the results she's getting, to others. Elizabeth showed this second-guessing tendency later, when she was narrating a story that demonstrated her own success in building productive and creative relationships in a Grande Prairie office. She noted, "I didn't play a major leadership in that. All I did was let the guys who knew what they know best -- do it. And looking back I think maybe I didn't do enough, maybe I'm just beating myself up, but I could have played a more proactive role in terms of changes."

Choosing the struggle to learn: Going through the gateway of disjuncture

What supports the worker-learner who ventures through the torn opening in her perspectives? What motivates her to want to enter?

As I pondered these questions, I noticed that the women in this study had developed strategies to support themselves. They had learned to lean on others, find listeners, re-name what was happening to them, and apply a structure to the process of disjuncture that helped them retain some control. Most of all, many of them had developed a certain confidence in their own ability to figure things out and eventually swim to the other side through what may at the moment have seemed to be an impossibly swampy middle. Each of these themes will be discussed in the sections below.

Moving through the pain: Remembering self-confidence

> I talk myself through the pain. I remember the last job I did: 'See, you took that on and did fine. You like challenge, you like pain.' I try to see the possibility for me, how I can win. I talk myself through the anxiety. Like when I bought my house and I was so worried about not having a safety net. And I said to myself, 'Look at those people, they don't have a steady paycheck even, and they do it.' Then I give myself little pats on the back -- 'See, you figured that out. You can do this.' -- Liz

Self-talk to bolster confidence appeared to be a common strategy among these women to get up the nerve to jump off the cliff of risk. Many of the women I spoke with had already developed a buoyant self-confidence, a can-do attitude, about learning. I can learn to do anything, said Liz. "I'm never afraid of doing something new," said Catherine, "until I look back later and see what I've done. And then -- wow!"

"I'll try it -- if I don't know I'll ask questions." "I'm an optimist." "I believe I can do anything." Mostly this self-confidence emanated from past experience of success -- I've done it before, walked into a totally new situation and handled it. Or from experiences of surviving trauma, suffered outside work life -- I know if I can handle that I can handle anything. The sky didn't fall in, I wasn't burned at the stake. When these women engaged in self-talk to help them move through the pain of uncertainty opened by disjuncture, it seemed they were remembering, not creating, their confidence in themselves. To talk to self, giving pep-talks or criticism, is to step momentarily outside the acting "me" to encourage or chastise. For women who were used to the chatter of voices "second-guessing" their actions, their worth, their belief that they had anything useful to offer, this played itself out as an ongoing internal dialogue.

Sometimes a woman stepped outside herself in a disciplinary role, making herself go through the aperture opened by disjuncture. Elana continued in a job in a restructuring department that presented daily changes and interpersonal muck-raking that threatened to overwhelm her. But she walked up the hill each day saying over and over to herself, "This is good for me." Denise also compelled herself to go through with risks that her self balked at. She also said, "I know I should -- it's good for me." Persephone felt this compulsion came from a divine authority: "When the Lord asks, you don't say no."

Sometimes a certain perspective, a realignment of priorities, produces the confidence to take a risk. This is, after all, the workplace: a paycheck, not a life mission. This release, a relaxing of commitment, must lie in a paradoxical place alongside the intensity of commitment, that passion of life intentions that engages a woman in her work enough to care about and learn from it. Elana explained:

> You can't take yourself too seriously. When the job becomes all-consuming, and I allow it to be because I'm not typically satisfied with anything I do, I'm never sure that I'm good enough, I want to be continuously improving -- when I get into that mode, I cross the line, I'm far too serious about who I am.

But Elana goes on to talk through the paradox:

> It's one thing to take your work very seriously. And it's another to take yourself seriously. To do innovative things, I have to take myself seriously. And somehow I have to balance that. There's a fine line.

In a pinch, Sarah simply asked herself, "What's the worst that can happen? Not doing it is worse than doing it." Carla also imagines, "What's the worst that can happen? All I can do is laugh. And I laugh a lot."

Confronting disjunctures early in a career: Ordeal by fire

A disjuncture experienced early in a career is often a crisis, a situation that mattered where one did not know what to do, and panicked. Wendy remembered,

> the man's muscles tensing, he was boiling, and I just suddenly knew he was going to hurt me. I went to talk with this man because he was supposedly beating his kids. Here I was, a young social worker, away I'd go to visit these people out in the boonies, in the rural areas. I was miles and miles from anywhere. What was I doing out there by myself?

Fran was all alone one night as a student nurse, responsible for two patients. One was dying and the other kept alive by a respirator -- both in extreme need, and she was to be there for them both through the night. Back and forth she moved, from one to the other. She didn't remember when she became aware of the voice inside that said, I can't do this anymore. In the morning, almost numbly, she put on her shoes and walked all the way back from the hospital, to her family home. "That's it", she told her father, who was a doctor. "I'm never going back."

Such disjunctures were often later storied by some women into a web of narrative that endowed them with meaning. Fran did go back. The story became one of learning to persist. "Of course you're going back," her father told her. "You're not quitting." Now as she gazed back at the young girl spending that long night with death, she said, "I was competent, I was doing everything I should have. But when you're younger you're so focused on your self."

Wendy's story was part of the narrative entitled "the terrible things that happened" early in her career, and the narrative has explanatory qualifiers: "I was so stupid back then. We weren't trained properly. No manager should have allowed that." The narrative has outcomes that resolve the conflict, too: "I got very stressed out. I really felt I had to leave." But these are later wrappings. At the time, said Wendy, "I didn't realize how bad it was. It's only now, looking back, that I can't believe I got through it."

When the women started out in the workplace they wanted to please, partly because many of them were still unformed enough in their adult identity to need external approval, and partly because their image of themselves depended on meeting their own standards, which tended to be high. The stakes they set themselves for their job performance were also high, and they hadn't yet experienced enough of their own competent performance to relax and quit trying to prove themselves to themselves and to the world, with every action they performed.

Disjunctures at this point in their careers were therefore especially threatening; their responses were particularly dramatic. They may not have developed many strategies for accepting their own mistakes, especially in situations with real consequences, and thus they may have responded to disjunctures with surprise or anxiety. Nancy remembered being terrified the first time she gave an intravenous. She'd been taught how, but "it was book learning. They assumed we could just do it. But it's one thing to think you know what to do. It's another to actually -- do it. After that experience I wondered, was I going to have to learn everything by trial and error?"

When she first came to this province, Denise couldn't speak any English. Living by herself with her father, she worked days as a waitress and spent nights alone in their apartment while he was working his second job, trying to make enough to bring the rest of the family to Alberta. When the man in the restaurant first started paying attention to her, she was flattered, then began looking forward to his visits and his teasing, feeling like she belonged even through the language barrier. He would laugh and call her his "beaver." She would laugh too, she thought it was endearment, he liked her. Later the other waitresses told her what it meant.

Denise made a resolve for herself: "I will never, never let someone do that again. I will learn English. No one will make fun of me so that I don't know what's going on. I will learn English. I will protect myself." And without money for classes or tutor, she taught herself the language.

Finding the balance between defiance and protecting oneself and remaining permeable to the learning available through other, differently-minded people is a challenge confronting the neophyte in a workplace. Wendy remembered experiencing a gradual shift from self-protection to more open-mindedness:

> I used to think I knew everything, when I was younger, when I first started to work at the treatment centre. I was more narrow-minded. It took me awhile to look at those older guys and think what they were doing was right and what it was that worked, instead of what they weren't doing. That attitude that everybody has something to say and what I think isn't necessarily right all the time . . . -- Wendy

Zoe describes her articling period with a small law firm as "ordeal by fire." She remembers one dilemma after another, and worrying all by herself, "is this right? what do I do? You just hope your mistakes won't be too fatal." Like the time the client just decided not to press charges any further. But Zoe thought, "he was hurt in the accident, he deserved to get something. And here's the insurance agent and the other lawyer pressuring you . . . . And what's your position, miss? Your client has *lost interest* ?" She said, "thank god for the clerical staff", all women. The other lawyers, all male, went for lunch together, but Zoe said she did not expect to be invited. "You feel that you are all by yourself."

People tortured by fire do not probably remember much from their ordeal. They might survive and escape before they're burnt up. But if they do, the scar tissue seems to block the places where the memories and knowledge should be. Zoe didn't have many stories she wanted to tell of her practice in law, not even funny ones. She didn't seem to remember clearly many of the other lawyers, her activities in the law firm, or the things she came to know there.

Inventing processes and structures: Navigating the disjuncture

When a woman is used to forcing herself to go through the eye of disjuncture, she develops strategies not only to cope with the pain of fear and loss of the familiar, but also to structure her activity so that she can learn from the experience instead of being beaten into helplessness by it.

Wendy, who said she hates to turn down any new project whether she has a clue or not about how to do it, said "there's always a way to get started." She was asked to develop a program in peer support training, an area she knew nothing about, but she talked her way through a learning process drawing from a variety of resources:

> At first I thought, "Oh gosh, this will be hard. How am I going to do that?" Then I kind of, "Oh. Wait. I know Bob. I'll have lunch with Bob." -- this fellow that I used to work with in staff training. So I got together and ran by him some of my ideas, and he gave me some ideas. And that was kind of the start. There's always a place to start. I start with what I know. And then, I knew that the counselling agency had developed peer support programs [from when I worked there]. So I went down to the their library. And they had, it was like striking a gold mine. I went down there and they must have had maybe five manuals and ten books on peer support. What a good start! . . . So I had that information, and then I said, "well, okay -- these people, these particular clients --what would be some of their special...concerns?" I'm always trying to tailor. . .

After re-grounding herself in the familiar she was able to invent her way into realms of the unfamiliar.

Liz learned to surrender to the process of learning her way through the disjuncture, not knowing the end, letting the goal emerge, and deferring her desire for product and closure. She described the process of needs assessment in her company as a long, complex, messy, back-and-forth pattern of communicating. "Real" good needs assessment is very different, she said, from the neatly planned diagrams in her training binders which prescribe formulas for conducting good needs assessments. Such formulaic procedures suggested that Liz survey people to ask what they wanted, pre-test to determine what they needed, write learning objectives, and so on in an apolitical rational-technical means-end linear process that assumed people knew what they needed to learn and could state it, that never questioned whether learning "need" existed a priori to human interaction with particular tasks in particular environments, and that never critically examined the act of someone external to the learner presuming to determine that learner's needs, then "helping" that learner fulfill these "needs."

Liz found, however, that she couldn't impose such controlling structures on real people working together. She needed to tolerate a process of helping people define their needs as they worked towards them. Unlike the linear predictable process of standardized needs assessment, the real process was characterized by stop-and-start action, rounds of talk that sometimes seemed to have little purpose, interests that had to be juggled within a particular dynamic of power relations, and uncertain ends. Like Wendy, she grounded herself in the familiar to help her make sense of this complexity. She knew enough about people and was sufficiently confident in herself as a knower to name what was happening as she proceeded. Like Wendy, Liz also had enough confidence to maintain the forward momentum that carried her through the tangles and boggy swamps that mark the journey.

Both women worked from their foundations of knowledge, which they honored and used as a base from which to move confidently to try something new. Even if it was a fight against gnawing doubts of self-worth, both worked to build a sense of a solid core of self, a firm sense of their own position relative to the disjuncture. From this position they framed the disjuncture so it made sense. They needed to maintain a certain distance to be able to see it and name it, to hold up the experience against their existing meaning frameworks to give it shape and a manageable process. Then they could move into it confidently, and let the experience swell into themselves, possibly shaping and changing them.

Finding supportive listeners

A theme that was echoed many times in the stories of the women I studied was the need for human presence, a listener, to help them through their struggles with a disjuncture -- not necessarily a teacher and certainly not "just-in-time training." Persephone says, "Sister Joanna give good hugs." When some women were faced by a fissure in their world picture that threatened to engulf them, what they wanted most was a sense of being supported by a human web. They needed reassurance that this gaping crack was perhaps just their own bad sculpture of themselves in the world. They wanted to believe that the experiences which rocked their unity of understanding, however painful, made sense in a larger design -- they were shared by others, and they had purpose. Their disjuncture was not just some aberration that had to be tolerated somehow, then forgotten.

Other people who shared themselves often helped women the most. Nancy called this "feedback." Feedback was the opportunity to tell her story of the problem situation to someone who would be present humanly, perhaps an informed practitioner who listened empathically. The most valued listeners tended to empathize with a woman's difficulty, acknowledged it as legitimately unfamiliar, then validated what the woman had chosen to do. As part of this validation the listener might ask questions that gently coached a woman to think through significant dimensions of the experience: "Did you try . . . ?" During her service as a community health nurse, Nancy "ran" into many difficult situations demanding her to choose action on the spot. A senior suffering poor health partly caused by her dirty home, poor nutrition and hygiene habits was judged by Nancy to be

> not really competent. She was in that grey area -- and what ethically could I do for her? I really wanted to go in and clean her house, see that she was taking better care of herself. My interests were in her better health but she also had some say in that -- and what reasonably could I do to maintain her dignity as a person to make her own decisions? What can I do?

Zoe's experiences of teaching for the first time in a college were a radical change from her years in the lawyers' office. There were colleagues who would listen to her classroom stories and feel with her, to help her see what was happening and make sense of it -- sympathy for the impossible perplexities of teaching, celebration for the small moments. She attended all the short courses offered by the college giving her practical tips for dealing with her classes, right on campus where she could relax and meet people who told their stories. She heard that her dilemmas were shared by others, that she was not a private failure, that she belonged. Here, in contrast to the lawyer's office, she realized she was not alone.

To make sense of what she described as the chaos in her continually restructuring government office, Elana talked to herself. She built belief that there was a deeper, nobler purpose to what was happening, a belief which helped her to manage the pain of continuing to work in an organizational environment so rocked by daily changes in policy, roles and responsibilities that she called it World War III. She told of walking to work every day, saying to herself over and over, "This is good for me, this is good for me." She said to herself, "You know you learn from new challenges, you know you will grow, that this pain is just part of the whole process." She also turned to books, naming Stephen Covey and William Bridges as favourite authors. The books helped her "nurture my own spirit and my own soul because you can lose yourself in an organization like this." The books were "like a compass . . . help me figure there's a future beyond this.

That while we're going through this -- [it] is good, character-forming. I will be a stronger person because of this."

Liz didn't take on challenges that are too overwhelming: "If I feel I'm just setting myself up for failure, I shut 'em down. But I talk myself through the pain. First I see the possibility for me to win. I tell myself I'm interested in it. I remind myself that I like challenge. I give myself little pats on the back."

Sometimes a woman just escaped from a disjuncture that was so threatening to her self-image that she couldn't absorb it, make sense of it, shrug it away, or find another satisfactory stance towards it. "We'll have tea together," said Persephone, "a bunch of us will sit around and it'll get my mind off it. Or I walk. Or sometimes I just go in the bathroom to have a good cry, that's all I can do because I have a job to do and I can't do it." The workplace often offers no time or space for the full unfolding of these human dramas. The sorts of experience that workplace educators want people to act within and reflect upon do not generally include crying in the bathroom. As Persephone sensed, her private experience of the moment and the official reality comprising the "job" were incongruent. Her solution was to hide away, removing herself and her messy incongruous state from the workplace.

Choosing a stance to the disjuncture: A question of identity

Disjuncture in work can be perceived in two distinct ways: by being alert to a discrepancy in the picture, or by actively seeking to render disjoint what appears to be seamless and unassailable. Different women responded differently to different circumstances at different times in their work lives to adopt one or both of these two orientations. Whether through apprehending discrepant details or actively creating these details, the experience of disjuncture was only the first glimmer of light, the first crack in the picture. Many of these women seemed capable of rather extraordinary intuiting of subtle disjunctures, and of imaginative reconstructions of the world through disjuncture. But a woman's response to the disjuncture was idiosyncratic. Action might have been taken immediately or delayed. A disjuncture may have been tolerated and explained away, or it may have opened a question that was pursued relentlessly. A woman may have chosen to position herself in resistance to a disjuncture, or to open herself and her current beliefs to its ravages.

Resisting the disjuncture: Defense and protection

The women also told of resisting a learning opportunity. In some of these stories, a woman adopted a defensive posture, a conflictual stance, towards the potential object of knowing. Listen to Denise, after she was told by the owner, Charlie, that she was part of the source of conflict with her manager:

> I go and talk to Wayne at lunch. And I tell him, no, I can't do all this. I can't continue working all these hours. I need help. The office needs organization. I can help him with that if he'd like me to. He said, 'Well don't worry so much about the quality. But I'm somewhat of a perfectionist . . . He somehow managed to turn the conversation where he made it sound like this was my problem. And we sat there for an hour and half and no matter how much I denied what he said and argued with him, it always came around to him wanting to peg it as my personality issue. I said, 'Wayne, no. Get it out of your head. Tom (her manager) and I get along great. We're both pigheaded, and that's fine. We've laughed about that. If I have something on my mind I'll tell Tom. If he has something

> he'll tell me. We're okay. So get that off your mind. Just focus on the issue. We lack staff. We lack training. We lack expertise.'

Here is a disjuncture, a new perspective on a situation that up till now she had interpreted according to her own interests and analysis of the issue. This lunch was her opportunity to see the issue through someone else's subjective world. She cared about the relationships with both Wayne and Tom, she cared about what others thought of her, and she certainly cared about her job, so the disjuncture was supported by her intentionality. It is evident that she was engaged. Why, then, did Denise not enter this situation as a learning opportunity? She did not in the least make her meaning structures about herself vulnerable to alteration through this incident. She didn't entertain the credibility of what Wayne was telling her, despite his status as her boss. She learned (because all experience modifies one's stores of information and understanding), but her learning might been summarized as: Wayne is unable understand the real issue, he is not listening to my needs so I won't get the resources I've asked for, I must protect myself from here on, I can't trust him, perhaps I should look for different employment. It seems that people resist "positive learning", the learning the organization requires for smooth functioning and competitive innovation, when they have made themselves vulnerable and then been cut. They retaliate.

Catherine angrily narrated for me the story of being rejected by a small publisher for her proposal and sample chapters for a book. I knew she'd worked hard at the chapters, and had sublimated into them her deep beliefs about helping people learn. Although earlier in the year she had enthused about the project and the man himself, now she was furious. I struggled to understand Catherine's position. The publisher had sent what to my ears was a polite and gracious letter thanking her for her hard work; attached were a series of detailed and rather extensive suggestions from the editor for revision of the proposal. Here was a disjuncture in experience directly related to her intentionality: why didn't learning occur? Catherine heard criticism and rejected it.

Resistance to learning doesn't just happen when people feel insulted or defensive, but also when they feel overwhelmed. Women sometimes told stories showing their retreat to helplessness when confronted by a disjuncture that was either too wide, or too destabilizing, for them to control sufficiently to navigate themselves through it in a learning mode.

Elizabeth said she was feeling "stuck" in the massive visioning project for the public sector department she worked in. The project ground to a halt after the human resources people turned the "learning" vision into a manual of competencies with training paths attached. Now the director had asked Elizabeth to save it. She didn't know where to start, or what to do next. She felt she needed some expectations, some sense of certainty or structure. She felt all alone and depleted. She was struggling with the despondency left over like old party decorations from the collapse of the previous visioning process into which she'd flung all her creative energy. Now she couldn't find the minimal support and affirmation she needed to venture out and risk once again.

Sometimes a disjuncture is sufficiently threatening to sense of self or so painful in the immediate moment that the individual just focuses on surviving it; perhaps sense can be made of it later. Or not. Wendy recently facilitated a three-day career-search workshop for unemployed people, some of whom had to attend to receive their UIC benefits. On the first day one man confronted her, attacking her credibility and the legitimacy of the program. She felt "flabbergasted":

> When he lit into me it was like a knife attacking. Omigosh, how will I handle this? It took me by surprise. I was thinking -- survival. He'll wreck it for everybody. I was trying to hear what he was really saying -- what are his intentions? He needs to make me feel small. I won't put up with it. These poor women are so shy as it is, they're just shrinking now, how will I help them get back into this workshop and feel good about themselves?

When she was probed about how she handled the incident, Wendy recalled: "In hindsight, I guess I did do some good things. I called on my experience counseling defensive clients. Let him be. Let him stand his ground. And there wasn't a perfect way to do it", but this wasn't what impressed her after the incident. Instead, in her own reflections after the incident she highlighted the man's attack and the impossibility of her own position, forced to help him learn something he didn't want. Later she found herself making a decision not to do any more of these workshops. "It wasn't a learning. That incident caused me to pull back. I can't do this to myself."

Blind spots and ink blots: Who are allowed to be the picture makers?

Denise formed an original picture of her new employer based on trusting that the motives of the software company matched her own values. She worked long hours and threw herself into the creative demands of the projects. The picture that propelled her energy and gave meaning to her work was a family of employees all giving equally of themselves to fulfill a collective dream of launching a new idea. Little by little, things began to happen that didn't fit with this picture. These little things began as tiny itches, barely-noticeable discrepancies in the "picture". Details of work that Denise thought were crucial for quality, flaws she wanted to spend time fixing, she was told to overlook. Her male boss did not participate in the flow of talk she wanted: "I couldn't figure out what he was thinking." She began to notice incidents in which a younger female clerical assistant was treated with less respect by the boss and the male owners than Denise felt she deserved. When the owners put on "the squeeze", and the workload pressure was increased, Denise's attitudes began to change, reverting to a paradigm of labor measured and sold in a commodity exchange. Rather than regarding her time on the company's project as immersion in exciting learning -- her own intentions, she began to count her "over-time" -- a commodity of self sold, not given, to fulfill the company's intentions -- and requiring appropriate compensation. But her overtime hours were neither rewarded nor acknowledged. Then she was accused of having a personality problem with the manager. The "straw" for Denise was the gaping disjuncture between her standards of quality and the software income-tax program that finally emerged from their collective labor. It was mediocre but put on the market anyway.

> . . . and only for the sake of competition to be on the shelf first. They have the ability to produce a top-notch product but they produced something that was less than mediocre. I was literally appalled. That was indicating a company that had no integrity. You're doing something that you don't believe in. If they can do that and feel good about that, I don't want to work here. I wondered, am I insane? No. So that started putting new twists on things. By this time I've grasped that this company is so unscrupulous they just want to get rich fast and don't care how they get there. There's many little things that led me to this picture . . . .

Denise's story illustrates a perceptual shift that comes after assimilating into herself a particular picture of the world, then holding onto it as it became increasingly distorted by new data until it shattered. At that point she accepted a new picture that governed her way of perceiving the world. Catherine demonstrated a very different way of orienting herself to the world. When her senses confronted her with a particular picture of the world, her imagination instantly produced an alternative. She said, "I see the picture without the barriers. I look to see, how else can we do this?"

Disjuncture: Seeking Freedom from Difficulty and New Imaginative Possibilities

This chapter has discussed disjuncture as confrontation of something unfamiliar in experience, leading to learning. The experience or potential object of knowing could be the behavior of another or the self, an event, a tool, an idea. The women participating in this study, self-described continuous learners in the workplace, apparently often sought disjuncture by taking risks, and volunteering for new task assignments. They opened themselves to disjuncture through their very orientation to the world: endeavoring to slow down and listen to the details of their reality, to use imagination to see the familiar freshly, to ask 'why' questions, to review happenings and attempt to interpret them. They supported themselves through the uncertainty, ambiguity and difficulty of confronting a disjuncture by bolstering their confidence, deliberately using processing strategies to turn shock into learning, and by leaning on other people.

This chapter has also shown how disjuncture is fundamentally entwined with intentionality. These women attended most to objects of knowing, whether instances of communicative or instrumental action, that were aligned with their intentions. They recognized and engaged in disjunctures in flow of rapport among people, in ethical discrepancies, in new alternatives for community building and sustenance, and in opportunities to create or serve.

Jarvis (1992) states: "Disjuncture occurs whenever there is a lack of accord between the external world experienced by human beings and their internal biographical interests or knowledge. . . .when the dwellers in the Garden of Eden ate of the tree of knowledge of good an evil, they were no longer in harmony with nature. Disjuncture came about, forcing them (and us) to try to recapture this harmonious relationship. Disjuncture makes learning possible. The paradox is that if harmony is fully established, there can be no learning situation." Jarvis goes on to explain that the conditions of change, which are inherent in the "modern" world, thus present a continuous series of disjunctures which humans strive to resolve (through learning) in an effort to pursue the elusive harmony of perfect understanding.

This conceptualization of disjuncture is based on what psychologists of learning term the "disequilibrium" model (Prawat, 1993), which holds that an impasse or perturbation in an individual's understanding of experience creates a tension which the individual seeks to resolve through reasoning or seeking information. Thus the act of seeking understanding is in fact understood to be problem-solving, or seeking freedom from difficulty. And indeed, competent problem-solving tends to be the focus of workplace learning and the development of practitioner expertise (Schön, 1983; Baskett and Marsick, 1992).

Mezirow's (1991) model of transformative learning is premised on this perspective of cognitive disequilibrium. A "meaning perspective" (Mezirow, 1991) might rupture under the impact of a significant disjuncture and the individual's deep reflection on this disjuncture, depending upon its strength and resilience, or expand with elasticity to become more "discriminating, permeable, integrative, and inclusive" (Mezirow, 1991). People may feel loss or pain through the "triggering incident" of a disjuncture. They may experience temporary fragmentation, disorder, or instability. Or they might feel more alive, discover a sense of wonder: "noticing, feeling, digesting" the world, as the writer Goldberg (1993, p. 73) describes the experience of awakening to the point where "every moment and everything became my teacher" (p. 73). Green (1978) writes that such encounters "make it possible for us to come in contact with ourselves, to recover a lost spontaneity . . . we must break with the mundane and the taken-for-granted. We must . . . bracket out the ordinary world . . . No longer in the domain of the conventional and the routine, we discover the ways in which structure or hierarchies or even bureaucracies are actually given to our consciousness" (Green, 1978, p. 2).

But there is more to disjuncture than dissonance, or wakefulness as Green (1978) and Goldberg (1993) might call it. Certainly the assumption that humans everywhere and always seek harmony deserves questioning. In this study, for example, the examination of intentionality demonstrated that women who called themselves continuous learners felt stagnant and unhappy when they achieved harmony with their sociocultural communicative worlds of work. The limits of the disequilibrium model of learning lie in its orientation to "equilibrium" as an ideal or even a natural state in human relationships to one another and to their natural environments. Such a conceptualization, if narrowly interpreted, precludes the possibility of a human being actively seeking to interrupt precisely that status quo of equilibrium, seeking freedom through imaginative possibility.

The problem-solving orientation, where individuals seek control of their world through eradication of obstacles, is certainly evident in some of the examples of disjuncture presented in this chapter. But an orientation of "problem-creating", seeking to raise questions and invent possibilities, making the familiar strange, is also apparent in certain disjunctures that lead to learning. One characteristic that many of the women in this study appeared to share is an active attunement to the here-and-now, their disjunctures being momentary awakenings to the obvious. These women didn't always wait passively for situations of dissonance to present themselves: they often initiated the disturbances creating the encounters with disjuncture.

Many of the women I interviewed told stories that indicated they reviewed their own actions in the workplace regularly. This period of "reflective observation", in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, was the time when the actor distances herself from concrete action to make observations, raise questions, and interpret what has happened. In the next phase of learning, "abstract generalization", the actor constructs theory, drawing new principles for action from her reflections, which she then tests against new situations of practice in the final phase of the cycle which Kolb terms "active experimentation."

Schön (1983, 1987) is perhaps one of the most widely-cited writers in the area of reflective practice as it is configured in workplace learning. Schön directed his focus at the learning of professionals, arguing that the formal theoretical structures comprising most professionals' pre-service education are inadequate in helping professionals to deal with the messy "swamp" of real-life practice in a complex and changing world. People in the workplace are more apt to meet unstable and unpredictable situations presenting problems which do not fit the theory frames they had been taught. Instead, these problems tend to be complex, unique, indeterminate, and embed value conflicts and paradoxes. Schön claimed that practitioners construct knowledge through reflection-in-action (experimenting-on-the-spot) as well as reflection-on-action (later deliberation). A surprising situation triggers reflection, and learning follows naturally as the practitioner improvises spontaneously as part of the artistry of good practice. To learn reflectively, a practitioner must be alert to surprises, able to problematize taken-for-granted situations in what may have become habituated practice.

Schön's (1983) notion of "reflection-in-action", requiring the distancing and withdrawal into the intellectual realm of understanding our own meaning-making processes *while* engaged in the thick of action, relying largely on tacit and multiple thought processes that our rational mind may well be incapable of understanding, was difficult for some of the women to accept. Reflection does not often happen in action, but later, after the hurly-burly of multiple signals from others and the pressure to make instant decisions to respond appropriately was past. As Taylor (1995) points out, "looking *at* one's perceptual framework while also looking *through* presents the same kind of paradox as pulling oneself up by the bootstraps; both activities require one to be in two places at the same time." (p. 22). In reflecting on their practice, the women were observing themselves observing; examining how they constructed the personal reality that shaped how they continued to construct their reality. Not all people are developmentally capable of such cognitive gymnastics and deep entry into layers of the self and its thinking processes. And as some writers argue, people must depart from experience to achieve the necessary critical distance "to fathom aspects of the world hidden from the eyes of its authors and actors" (Cocks, 1985, p. 175).

A great deal of writing is increasingly focused on the importance and functions of critical reflection to unearth and test this theory-in-use in the day-to-day learning of practitioners in the workplace. Writers such as Argyris (1993), Marsick and Watkins (1990), Brookfield (1987), and Dixon (1993) are interested in promoting on-the-job critical reflection as a way to develop "learning organizations", to foster continuous workplace learning. They have shown how practitioners experience profound learning when they scrutinize their own processes and premises of thinking to uncover those 'blind spots' and 'taken-for-granted' assumptions which maintain dysfunctional thinking and behavior patterns. A key focus of this literature is exploring ways to help practitioners interrupt their ordinary thinking patterns so that they might better confront, critique, and liberate their own thinking from paralyzing deep structures and the defensive routines which Argyris (1993) claims they use to protect these structures.

Mezirow (1991) distinguishes three types of reflection: reflection on purpose, reflection on process, and reflection on premise. Reflection on premise, claims Mezirow, is the deep sort of reflection that is part of transformative learning. Individuals are somehow unseated from their own system of assumptions and beliefs, and begin to interrogate personal frames of reference or worldviews, which Mezirow calls "meaning structures", through which they have been interpreting their sensory experiences of the world. Reflection on workplace action among these women often seemed more fluid, more concerned with the particular and the practical, whether the object of reflection is communicative or instrumental action. The important dimension was its distancing from helter-skelter performativity. Reflection dwells in a different realm than intersubjective action in material reality:

> Some reflection is oriented to future action (anticipatory or preactive reflection); some of it is reflection on past experiences (recollective or retrospective reflection). But in either case, reflection is a form of human experience that distances itself from situations in order to consider the meanings and significance embedded in those experiences. By reflecting on an experience I have the experience of grasping and appropriating meanings embedded in that experience. Inevitably the reflective moments of life involve a temporary stepping back or stepping out of the immediate engagement we have with the world. 'Where there is reflection, there is suspense,' said Dewey. As we reflect, we suspend our immediate involvement in favor of a more contemplative attitude. (van Manen, 1991, p. 100-101)

Yet this picture of reflective experiential learning, where the intentionality that engages a person's interest is interrupted by a disjuncture in the experiential flow which stimulates the learning process, is not complete. The instances illustrating these women's resistance to learning from certain disjunctures, or confrontations with things unfamiliar or unexpected that are apparently aligned with their life intentions, are discrepant. What is it that causes these women sometimes to confront the unfamiliar object as painful, and sometimes as pleasure-giving? Why do they sometimes open themselves to the learning inherent in the confrontation, while other times they shut down and reject or attack the object? What affects the way women interpret and thus position themselves to the disjuncture? These questions point to a new area for exploration, the dimension of positionality.

Chapter 7

Positionality: Power and Presences

> [Stories of educational experience] help us to negotiate the tension between the individual and community, a tension never resolved or resolvable because of the fact of difference, a tension which indeed is the subtext of all educational narratives. (Pagano, 1990, p. 12)

> Face to face with the presence of offered meaning which we call a text (or a painting or symphony) we seek to hear its language. . . . We are utterly free not to receive. (Steiner, 1989, p. 153, 156)

Positionality in Workplace Learning

Positionality for these women refers to the ways they chose to act towards others during their learning. Their positions included not only their stance with reference to interpersonal relations, but also a "fit" within the workplace organization. Their position within the larger community was also identified as influential by some. Hence the women's experiences have been grouped to illustrate their responses and reactions under the following categories: how they chose position with respect to others; how they chose position themselves within a workplace community, their position of perspective and role responsibility, and finally the women's positioning for connectedness. In the second section of the chapter, issues of positionality and the relation among the three dimensions are explained.

Choosing a position of tact: Opening to the presence of "otherness"

How do people determine who they listen to and they don't in the workplace? Who did these women allow into their realms of meaning, and who did they turn away from with indifference? And did their tendency to position themselves in potential learning situations relative to others change in different workplace contexts, and at different periods of their working careers? In the sub-sections below, the women's positionality with respect to their superordinates, their colleagues, and during times of "apprenticeship" will be discussed in terms of how this positionality affects their workplace learning. The final subsection raises the issue of an adversarial positionality, exploring how and when such a position may be established in a potential learning situation.

Choosing an open position to a superordinate

In the workplace, positional hierarchies, still rigidly pyramidal in some organizations, define communication patterns and lines-of-command. If there are any sanctioned teaching-learning relations, the teacher authority is usually the person with greater seniority or classification status. Learning does not often flow upward. Sometimes the women in this study would narrate stories demonstrating positive influence on their learning from a superordinate. Carolyn said that although she had always been a seeker wanting to know more, she learned how to ask "why" questions from her supervisor. This woman, explained Carolyn, was energetic, efficient, and wise. Most of all, she apparently cared about Carolyn and the staff. She spent time with

Carolyn reviewing, for example, those oft-dreaded evaluation forms that participants fill out after a training session. Carolyn learned from this supervisor's modeling how to analyse these forms: "Even if the response is positive, ask 'why did this person react this way to this activity or that topic?'"

Elizabeth's story shows that no matter how much a woman may admire and initially seek to emulate a person in a status role, if she is unable to create a connective rapport the power of the role model founders. Elizabeth admired the deputy minister she worked with, and told me at our first interview about her glowing regard and excitement about working with and learning from this "brilliant", "creative" man. However, she was more guarded a few months later. He had given her the new project but no direction or assistance: "He hasn't got a lot of time for students." Most hurtfully, he had pulled rank on her: when she confided to him her career aspirations, he "put me somewhat in my place." Although she still maintained that she admired this man, the trust seemed to have withered and with it, her openness to learn from him.

The women also described learning negatively from some people, like Carla whose experience with the uncommunicative rude arrogance of a supervisor early in her career taught her "I will never act that way with my staff."

Choosing and opening to the presence of a role model

People in the workplace are surrounded by models of behavior demonstrating particular social norms of the organizational culture. Much of this learning is what Marsick and Watkins (1990) describe as "incidental learning": ways of thinking and acting that people absorb tacitly, assumptions that they assimilate without testing, a whole set of behaviors that they learn often without consciously choosing or planning to do so, that enable them to function effectively in the social system of a particular workplace. But people also deliberately select, from the models of different styles of practice and attitudes that they observe around them in a workplace, particular people to emulate. Not surprisingly, the women in this study did not refer, in their stories of workplace learning, to the countless fragments of situations and observations and signals that produced their incidental learning. Instead, they often pointed to specific role models whom they believed had wielded significant shaping influences on their workplace attitudes and practices.

From the model of her supervisor Denise learned how to structure her work (set a goal then plan all the steps backwards), and both confidence and strategies for talking through troublesome issues with workplace colleagues. When she was confronted by sensitive communicative dilemmas later, Denise pictured as a guideline how this supervisor might have handled the situation. What she remembered most clearly, however, were the hours she spent working side by side with this woman. Denise felt that despite the difference in their formal positionality, the two women enjoyed relations of rapport and mutual equality. Like Carolyn, Denise opened to a supervisor apparently despite, not because of, the rank and authority of that superordinate. Both women admired the behavior they observed in their supervisors, and sought to emulate this behavior. But equally important to this respect, was the fact that the supervisor cared about them, listened to them, took time with them.

Choosing a path through apprenticeship

These women's most vivid stories of role modeling came from early years in their careers, when they were experiencing what appeared to be an informal apprenticeship. Apprenticeship is a time when work identities may be still malleable. Novices in a workplace may expect to be somewhat more deferential in a knowledge community in which they seek membership than they are after years of experience in one or more workplace communities. They are anxious to learn, to become competent as quickly as possible, and actively seek models to show them what to do and how.

Apprenticeship may be remembered as a dreadful time, as "ordeal by fire", as illustrated in the previous chapter. Or it may be recalled as a positive experience. I could not detect any patterns indicating the relative effects on a woman's workplace learning or career development produced by what she experienced to be either a positive or negative apprenticeship. I presume this was because the data of this study collected a self-reported oral history, in which women didn't often imagine alternatives to themselves and their knowledge except what their biographies had created them to be.

The factors common to what were described as positive apprenticeships include a variety of new tasks, one or more experienced role models who have a distinctive working style that the new apprentice respects, who take time to show the apprentice what to do, and who patiently listen to the apprentice's questions. Janis and Carla both remembered their apprenticeship vividly as exhilarating, full of hard work and constant learning. As a novice on the set of a film documentary, fresh out of university and eager to work hard, Janis was plunged into a situation where "everybody did everything -- there was so much to do, and you learned it as you went." She worked with two very different people who she knew were both "good filmmakers. They didn't always know the answers, but they had very different styles of writing and editing . . . . It was a wonderful, dynamic mix." Both were patient, generous with their time, and "always let me ask questions" as Janis assisted them.

As a 17-year-old working in a bank for the first time, Carla said she was "mentored" by two women who were impressive to her in their complete attention to detail and accountability, their dedication to consistent excellence in their work, and their loyalty to the bank. She remembered them vividly. Each was very different in her particular methods, but the mix of both, said Carla, helped her see what were "the important principles" in the bank: consistency, honesty, loyalty, hard work, scrupulous attention to detail, responsibility. The differences also allowed her the freedom to develop her own unique ways of working to uphold the organization's values, seek its mission, and meet its high standards.

Both Janis and Carla had concrete learning goals -- I want to learn to be and do what these role models are -- and both had ample direct teaching and indirect demonstration to assist them in moving towards the goal. Both also had constant opportunity to practice imitating the model, with immediate feedback and evidence of the consequences of their actions, in authentic contexts of practice. These conditions shape the ideal learning situation according to the theories of situated cognition.

Zoe's apprenticeship as a lawyer, what she calls the "ordeal by fire", did not provide her with much role modeling. This is, she explained, because so much of the work was paper-based and completed by each lawyer's privately, in the firm where she articled. She had vague memories of learning from lawyering performances that she observed in court. She discovered that advocacy skills -- convincing the court of a client's position -- were the most crucial to learn. Then she watched other lawyers, trying to discern what was good and what wasn't. It wasn't always apparent, and everybody had a different style. But, she explained, one learned the protocol, the phrases to use in certain situations. The people she remembered were the small circle of articling women she'd met in law school who met periodically throughout that first horrible year, and the legal secretaries who showed her what to do. These were the people she listened to.

In the later stages of a particular career, when many of the women felt more confident in their own competence, workplace identity, and knowledge in a particular field, they seemed less inclined to position themselves automatically in clear deference to a role model or teacher. The people they chose to listen to and learn from, or watch and imitate, seemed to be more equal than superordinate. In the stories that these women told of people who influenced their learning after they'd become established in their careers, one significant theme was that they felt that these people cared about them. The learner felt respected by the other person, mostly because the other listened.

Choosing an open position to a colleague: Being listened to

When I asked her to describe someone she learned from, Wendy told me she still had lunch periodically with a former male colleague whom she admired for his sense of humor and compassion. But most of all, "He's one of these people who studies just for the joy of learning." She finds him interesting and enthusiastic because like her, he's also an inquirer. Perhaps inquirers put people at ease because their positionality is non-threatening: their orientation to the world is one of seeking and deference, openness and vulnerability. They are more likely to be listeners, meaning they listen, which grants people the power of presence. When Wendy's own experience and identity was validated, she could relax and be open to learn.

Liz told of a colleague with whom she had worked closely for five years. "I learned so much from him," she said. This man taught her how-to things, but also listened to her, created projects with her, worked with her ideas. An important dimension in the relationship, from Liz's perspective, appeared to be the connections they forged through much time spent talking, often about philosophical beliefs, spirituality, morality. They understood one another, it was a wonderful rapport, said Liz. Intuitively and emotionally she felt bonded to him. On a rational level, however, he had a very different working style, one that she was not comfortable with. "This man was so detailed!" remembered Liz. "He would draw these big process maps and I'd say, 'Dan, I don't know what all those little steps are, I just know what I want to get.'" When the announcement came that one of them had to be bumped from the job, Dan had the seniority. But they discussed it. "I'm in a rut," he said. "I'm not, I'm still learning," she said. So Jim left.

Liz's story shows a relationship that she considered to be one of mutual equality, and respect. Gender didn't seem to be an issue in Liz's understanding of her relations in the workplace: she told stories of learning or not learning from, trusting or not trusting, both men and women. She believed Jim genuinely listened to her, and thus she felt affirmed. She was willing to be open and listen to him, while at the same time recognizing differences, rejecting certain aspects of his practice such as his logical-sequential approaches that didn't fit for her.

Nancy remembered the most helpful colleague she ever met was a woman who never gave her answers when Nancy approached her for advice on difficult problems, never told her anything. Nancy explained that, despite her initial frustration at not being taught didactically, "I probably wouldn't have really liked that anyway." Instead, this woman simply listened. "She would just ask me these really insightful questions to drag out of me what was already there. At the end of the interview I felt totally different -- clarified. She helped me clarify things for myself." It seemed that the woman's listening and questioning stance created a connective relationship where Nancy's own position became powerful respective to the woman; Nancy was the speaker, the teacher. She was able to relax and turn inwards to listen to herself.

Choosing an adversarial position: Power, interests, value differences, and self-protection

An interesting thread for me in the women's stories of other people, were the situations of conflict, where a woman chose a closed adversarial position rather than an open welcoming position to another person. What happens when a disjuncture -- a potential learning situation -- opens in an interpersonal relationship with another person, and an individual doesn't learn from it? The incidents of conflict, in stark contrast to incidents women identified as "learning", were often characterized by emotions of frustration and anger. When positionality was important and was threatened, an individual sometimes adopted a defensive or aggressive posture. The situation sometimes escalated into a polarized conflictual relation, where participants competed for position, voice, resources, and other sources of power, negotiating through adversarial strategies. The choices were either to withdraw, or to confront the other and fight it out for dominance, compromise or a collaborative win-win solution.

Denise told a story about the co-owner of the software company where she handled advertising, whose actions finally managed to convince her that the problems between them were due to his weak managerial skills and his unethical business practices. Up till that point she had positioned herself working with him, trying to enter his world to listen, understand, and connect to him -- allowing him "the benefit of a doubt" when unexpected outcomes or troubling information surfaced. But at the point where she decided he was wrong, she distanced herself. Now she gathered herself into an adversarial position, a closed position of non-learning, and confronted him. The language she used to tell the long story of their conversations back and forth indicated she felt demeaned, her self-image almost violated: "He manipulated me...trying to make me feel like I didn't know what I was talking about, insinuating that I wasn't working hard enough, insinuating that we had a personality conflict. I challenged him on every one of those accusations." In the telling, Denise was apparently non-reflexive about her own assumptions and interpretations of the interchange. The situation had frozen into polarities. She seemed satisfied that further attempts to talk it through and help him understand her own position were fruitless: "He was just not hearing me. This was not getting through." When she heard herself acknowledge finally, "He can't treat me like this!", she knew she could choose to stop the assault on her self-image. She quit.

This theme reappeared in others' stories, where efforts by others to control a woman triggered her self-protective positioning. Elana said, "I don't put up with controlling supervisors. I just leave." In each story, similar threads can be traced: once a decision had been made about the threat posed by the controlling other, attempts to reach out and make connections or open some dialogue were dropped. The complaint was often a charge against the other of manipulation, or of being treated as someone different from the personal image envisaged by the self. Emotional responses to such personal violation are so strong that abilities to reflect critically on such experiences and learn from them are often choked, even much later when looking back.

The interesting part of these stories was their contrast to the stories of learning from an other in the workplace, in which close connective bonds seemed to erase issues of positionality by confirming each person's power, and recognizing interdependence with the other. The connectedness generated an attitude of mutual caring, which created the trust that permitted reciprocal sharing of self.

Choosing a position within a workplace community

The workplace community's belief systems, language, and normative rules shape the activity of that workplace. The history of the community partly determines the meaning ascribed to the tools and the way of using them in the workplace, the rules for defining problems, and the possibilities for acting. The learner's understanding of the world and the tools at hand continually changes as a result of their interaction.

The nature and extent of participation in a community, a key dimension of workplace learning, was influenced by a series of interpersonal positionings. Participation was also affected by needs for authority. Different women have different needs for authority and status, and these needs tends to remain relatively stable in their participation in different communities. This was evident in their stories of negotiating position in different workplaces at different times of their lives. Marilyn preferred to be in charge, because she desired creative freedom and autonomy in decision-making affecting her own work. However, in her positionings in workplaces she still retained a servant role whether her formal role was director of a community or their teacher: she preferred not to be "leader" but to be "facilitator" of a group, drawing out others' thoughts and helping them to build connections with each other. Sarah tended always to like taking direction from someone else who was in charge, because she seemed to seek existing structures from which she could then blossom. But in her positioning of her self in her everyday interactions with others, she liked the authority to plan her own work and pursue her own ideas.

The women identified two ways to seek a fit with a new community, both of which affect a women's entrance into a workplace in varying degrees. One was to assess the extent of "fit" possibilities between herself and what she perceived the community to be all about. As Nancy's story illustrates, the individual didn't simply look for fit from a static personal position; in participating to the extent she had to in order to seek a fit, she exerted a shaping influence on the intersubjectivity of the community itself, which affected these possibilities for fit. Most of the women described situations where they examined the potential for fit between themselves and wanting to learn how to act in that culture. They often ascertained rather quickly whether they "fit" with a particular job in a particular workplace community or not. If there was little fit, some individuals psychologically withdrew from or physically left the community.

Another way to seek fit was by "fitting in", to deliberately subordinate their own preferences, natural ways of thinking and behaving and believing, in order to become enculturated into the community's norms. Apprentices desiring membership in a particular knowledge community may not be as quick to reject that community over a perceived lack of fit with their own values and beliefs; without first persisting in a committed effort to change themselves in order to fit. Audrey went into business after years teaching kindergarten on a Native reserve. She felt disconnected, uneasy, fearful of speaking in this new "real world" business community that took-for-granted many things in which she had no personal experience. The bottom-line profit values, the prominence of political strategy, and the jolting pace were uncomfortable fits for her. But she persisted in meeting and talking with people working in these areas. She deliberately set about learning the language and subtle cultural norms of the business world and its people in the relatively sheltered environment of university extension classes. Eventually she found herself understanding these new values and making sense of ways she could comfortably accommodate them. From her own disconnected space she grew to comprehend the community, and finally participate.

In the sub-sections below, the following themes of choosing a position relative to one's community will be discussed: trying to belong to a community by seeking a fit; choosing a position with respect to a community as an "adaptor" (accommodating self to the organization) or as an "innovator" (challenging the organizational norms); and struggling when there doesn't seem to be a fit with one's community.

Seeking a fit : Choosing to belong to the community

What creates a sense of "fit"? As Elana explains, it's more to do with a person's values and attitudes than what that person knows. Part of belonging is finding a fit between personal intentions and the challenges of the work. Nancy found a fit with a group of community health nurses that had an inner coherence. Despite working in hot stressful crowded conditions and serving a difficult clientele, or perhaps partly because of these conditions, the group developed a strong camaraderie. There was lots of humor, gifts, jokes, hugs. People cared about each other. They were "all white, female, educated, middle-class, young -- meaning we had energy and maybe some naiveté," explained Nancy. "We also had a common goal. The bottom line for all of us was, what will work for our clients? We decide we do it our way."

Wendy described a similar sort of atmosphere at the social service counseling agency where she worked a number of years. The warmth of belonging, the validation of self that happened when she had a clear position winding her into a community doing something aligned with her own intentions, generated strength and energy that all members drew from. The need for positionality among the women I spoke with was not necessarily a need for power over others, but rather a need for being needed, and being clearly understood to fill that need for others. This was a different sort of power -- the power that circulates in acts and relationships of reciprocity, in close sharing of self that reduces distance and creates bonds of unity. So when individuals fit together in a community they not only feel comfortable about participating fully in ways that facilitates their learning. They also create together what has been sentimentalized in popular literature but nevertheless seems to be a real phenomenon of human synergy.

What alerted these women to the fit of something new and unfamiliar with their own inner core of morals and intentions and understandings of themselves in the world? Liz relied on her intuition to alert her to fit. "It just comes to me that things feel right. This is it. This feels really good. It's that gut feeling...And when I hit something that goes against my value system, then I say, 'Uh-uh'. I don't think this fits for me. I don't know if it's right or wrong, but I know it's not for me. Then I keep my boundaries and my belief systems." Intuition guided her to determine her positionality, whether to remain guarded and distant from something new, the disjuncture that challenged existing beliefs, or whether to make herself open and vulnerable to it. An example was a five-day seminar she attended to develop personal excellence. It was not something she wanted or was interested in -- it was not part of her intentions at the time -- but the company paid and her boss strongly encouraged her. Then at the seminar she met "people who had something special -- a sparkle, that excitement, and I said, I want what they've got." The methods of the seminar felt right, the role models had formed surprising new intentions for her, and she opened to the whole experience. Now she claims it was life-changing, and she facilitates the seminars herself annually.

Choosing a position in a community that fits best: Adaptor or Innovator

In this study it became clear that different women felt a comfortable "fit" with their workplace community at different points along a continuum. At one extreme of this continuum are those women whom I shall call Adaptors. These women generally accepted and adapted themselves to the workplace community as it existed. They sought a fit connecting themselves within the tangle of relationships and functions inside the organizational community. They may have been risk-takers and critical questioners, perhaps even asking "why", but they did so from within their position as part of the community net. They didn't tear the net, just tugged on it: their focus was preserving and improving what was.

Adaptors: Accepting and accommodating to the organization

Elana tends to take an Adaptor position in an organization. She said she will not usually challenge authority. She had creative visions for projects and initiates things in her work, and always found a way to stretch the box of her job. But when change was imposed, she accepted it with the attitude: "How can I make the best of this? Where's the opportunity for me in all this?"

Carla and Liz both stayed with the same large organization for their entire working careers, Carla with a national bank and Liz with a multi-national chemical corporation. Both entered this community as young women, and both rose steadily through the ranks, gaining increasing responsibility . Neither undertook credentialled post-secondary education but both were extensively trained by their companies, and both called themselves professionals. Both claimed to feel creatively fulfilled in their work, to enjoy their multiple work activities, and to be happy in their work communities. As Adaptors, both respected the system of their company and sought to understand it, contribute to it, and ultimately reproduce it, with a few improvements which they actively initiated. Unlike Elana, who had worked in many different organizations, Carla and Liz seemed to be fundamentally shaped by the values and beliefs of their long-term employers. They didn't distance themselves enough to ask questions about the assumptions of the organization. They talked about their system as "we . . .": their own position was firmly enmeshed within it. Elana's Adaptor position seemed to stem more from her fear of losing a regular paycheck. "I'm from a generation of survivors. I'm very self-reliant. I'll never put myself in a position of being dependent on someone else. I'm never going to end up like my mother, out looking for work at age 56." This need for security lived in tension with her need for challenge, change, and opportunities to stretch. But Elana always found ways to work from inside the box of her secured job in the organization, not questioning the system but stretching the job to give herself the room to grow. When she got to a point where she moved further and further away from the community in the distancing of critical questioning, she simply left and found a new job.

Zoe also removed herself from a system, rather than seeking to change the system, when she could no longer tolerate its excesses. Her story about being sent back to classroom teaching after a period managing a large busy department in the college was about her difficulty adapting to the loss of freedom, scope of responsibility, and opportunity to use her new skills. She didn't seem to acknowledge the possibility of alternatives to the college's insensitive way of maneuvering human 'resources'. She eventually simply left the college, just as now she was readying herself to leave an administrative position in a patriarchal organizational culture where she was suffering harassment. She tried avoiding or ignoring the comments, endeavoring to understand her colleagues' perspectives, explaining her own point of view, and simply focusing on her job of serving student needs, in an attempt to adapt while retaining her integrity. But the fit seemed out of reach, so she began checking out other job 'openings'.

Kirsten also sought mainly to understand the system and find a way to insert herself into it. When she narrated tales of staff actively subverting management, or territorialism, information hoarding, strategic internal alliances, filibustering, demoralization and disillusionment, she did so with both acuity and fundamental acceptance that "this is the way things are." She sought change only within the small circle of staff with whom she worked, exercising personal influence within everyday relational interactions. Her communicative learning seemed to focus on formulating for herself rules and strategies for adapting to the organization while getting on with the projects she found most creatively satisfying.

At the other extreme of the continuum are those women whom I call Innovators. These women sought to position themselves outside whatever they perceived to be their workplace community. The very structures of the community were continuously open to question for these women. Nothing was fixed, all was flux and mutable. Their position might have been one of opposing, leading, or helping/teaching those in the community, but they didn't position themselves within the net of the community.

Innovators: Questioning and re-inventing the essence of the organization

The Innovators are people who will even risk personal security and connectedness to others to ask the why questions that rock the very core of a community's assumptions. They are the mavericks, the ones who not only innovate but often also distance themselves from the community, assuming a me -- they position. And they often suffer for their trouble.

Elizabeth suffered for years asking critical questions in an organization that liked giving directives: "All these musts -- you must attend to...., you must complete the following...., it's like parents telling their kids. We know it doesn't work with children -- why would we do it with adults? " Her sometimes aggressive questions earned her suspicion from others, defensiveness from the deputy minister. "I've learned that if I haven't followed procedure, that could be highly dangerous. I've learned to be quiet."

For a few months Elizabeth was flying high on the creativity involved in developing a new organizational learning philosophy to guide the community's change process. She'd been working with a small group of exciting people, people with art and energy. She wrote an article about the process which was published, and she was asked to write a chapter in a book. She felt alive.

Then it came time to implement the new philosophy of continuous learning which was to guide what had been known up till this time as "training" activities. Now Elizabeth was back working for a Human Resources Development supervisor, a successful bureaucrat, who immediately created a training calendar with the old competency boxes and objectives and fragmented training sessions. "We've lost the vision," Elizabeth moaned. "By mistake I said something about making these sessions less dry, more exciting, getting people involved -- and the supervisor said, 'That's not the purpose at all . . . .' Now I thought, I blew it again. I don't want to confront her because I've got to work with her right now. Better to live with it and try to get my interests and talents acknowledged elsewhere in my life." Why didn't Elizabeth talk it out with this HRD supervisor? She couldn't do that from inside, she explained. From the outside maybe she could work with the woman, and be honest. But from inside the positionality issues are complex. Elizabeth, the Innovator, questioning the other, was orienting herself from a superior position to a supervisor, trained by the bureaucracy to expect deference to her legitimate authority. Elizabeth was "put in her place", and settled somewhat resentfully into her position of smoldering compliance. "I feel so stuck," she said again and again.

Catherine said that in an organization when she was pushing for some new policy or program she often felt she was balancing on the tip of a limb: the others in the community were standing securely below on firm ground, encouraging her to jump. "But not one of them," she said with intensity, "will come up here with me and help." Marilyn had to take two months off to recover when she left her job as recreation director for a northern Alberta community -- so many battles, some triumphs like the town's fund-raising spaghetti supper that she convinced all the restaurants to join together to provide. These two women used to position themselves as Innovators who led from outside. The others in the community were "them", not "we." The stories these two women tell are similar in that both seem never to have felt interconnected, but always distanced somehow from those with whom they worked. When Marilyn ran the Ottawa office for the federal leader of the opposition, she deplored the scarcity of real people, authentic people. She was always apart. Now she looks back with sadness and says, "I was alienated, pretending to be a part of a world that wasn't me, never letting my real self show." Catherine said abruptly, "I got tired of working with idiots." Both Catherine and Marilyn left their jobs to manage themselves as contractors. Both say they will never ever work again for an organization.

Carla, like some of the other women in leadership positions, was an Innovator who positioned herself initiating from inside a workplace community, working through the people around her by building relationships. She described herself as a "hands-on" manager, working side-by-side with her staff and teaching by modeling:

> I strongly believe in personal accountability. I make a point to be out and about and much involved in what's going on. Constant follow-up -- I'm a nag sometimes. The staff come to know that they might as well do what they need to because I'm not going to forget about it.... I talk to them one-on-one, really listening to what their issues are, seeing how their day's going.

Like Carla, Nancy as an innovator sought to change the status quo of her workplace community, choosing to do so from 'inside', working in and through the women around her. In her new role as director of a community development and relief agency, she was struggling. The workers and clients were mostly women struggling themselves with enormous barriers of poverty, language, abuse, lack of parenting and communication skills, unemployment, fear, race-ethnicity differences, and low self-esteem. Nancy's white, middle-class, university-educated confidence supported her habit of continuous critical reflection. But people here weren't used to thinking about their lives, about what had happened to them: "Life is lived, then life is lived. It's not part of their repertoire to go back and say, that didn't go too well. Why not? What can I learn from it?" When Nancy tried leading them once through an activity of reflection, they thought it was a test. When she asked them questions like, "What are your expectations? Have they been met? What do you think this organization should be all about, anyway?" -- they were afraid they wouldn't get the right answer. Nancy was learning how little actions have grave significance, how a small thing left unsaid turns into a difficult mess of hurt and angry confusion. She was trying to learn how to be very clear in explaining herself. "It's hard", she said. "It's really hard."

Human beings can never be statically pinned to any classification scheme like this continuum as though they were specimens mounted for convenience of study. An individual may position herself as an Innovator with some communities, but as an Adaptor with others. Her position may depend on her sense of expertise relative to the others in the community, on her satisfaction with the composition of the community, or on her security of self with respect to others in a particular community. Like a planetary moon outside the system or an excited electron inside it, her position moves about in relationship with the system, always interconnected with it but not statically so. Complicating this concept of position even further is the natural shaping effect upon a woman by her knowledge community. She may begin her participation in a community by orienting herself to the organization as a defiant Innovator, autonomous and clearly outside the knowledge community. But as long as she continues to interact with that community, even if these interactions take the form of hostility or critical questioning, the flow of intersubjectivity which unfolds in these interactions inevitably tempers her mettle and molds her position. Her awareness of any of this depends upon her perceptions and interpretations of what she sees happening, her sense of her own changing self, her sense of her own position relative to the people in this knowledge community, and her intentions guiding the focus of her awareness and actions.

Struggling to fit when there seems to be no satisfactory fit

The assumption that an ideal fit is achievable -- where people become so subsumed as an essential part of the community fabric that they rarely are pricked by concerns of protecting their position -- seems to be a romanticized notion for the workplace. Certainly it belies an assumption that the worker can and should find a slot within the existing formal economy in which to insert herself and thrive. If the edges of her square peg noticeably grind against the round trap of her pigeon hole, she seems to choose to pop herself out and go try a new pegboard. The option of changing the shape of the hole, or of reconfiguring the board itself, seems either not to exist or present itself as a possibility.

But the search for the comfort of a fit with their workplace community continued to drive many. Some, like Persephone, kept seeking it restlessly, moving from job to job without always understanding why they felt compelled to move on. When Persephone left the police force she thought she was unstable, and felt inferior -- there must be something wrong with her that she couldn't tolerate what others evidently could. Now she said she realized she was searching for work with more meaning, a place where she felt she could fit.

Sometimes women found they could create their own niche to find the fit they sought with work. When she started to sell real estate, Audrey looked hard at the people around her, and realized she was not like them: "They're special, kind of driven. You really have to be committed to selling. You have to have that spark, believe that what you're doing will contribute, that you're not ripping anybody off. It's all related to money. What you're selling people is a lifestyle. I'm not flashy, I guess." But Audrey found that with first-home buyers, she could find a confidence that allowed her to relax. The work fitted her commitment to serving, and fitted her ways of relating to people intuitively. With the thrill of getting new buyers the home they wanted for a good deal, she felt she was taking care of people. She felt she had a niche.

Some continued the struggle to force a fit for a long time. Elizabeth became embittered after her years of feeling like the oddball in a very bureaucratic provincial government department. "I don't fit in very well," she said:

> I should have left years ago, get out of this rut. It's become a knowing organization, knowing procedures. These are the procedures that you will follow. But you've got to get beyond knowing to involving people in creating knowledge. That's more than telling them, that's exciting them, using all their senses and emotions. I get really lost when it comes to following procedures. I don't have a very logical mind, it doesn't matter if it's not definite for me. I work it out as I go along.

Some gave up the struggle altogether and resigned themselves to continue working, for as long as they could manage the isolation. After years in a college where she discovered she loved teaching law, Zoe was working in administration for a law faculty. The focus here was research, not teaching; the environment was adversarial, the people were not collegial, her beliefs about learner-centered teaching were definitely not a fit ("What planet did you drop out of?" she was asked by a male law professor). She knew all that and could justify it from her knowledge of the discipline and its norms. But it was no fun being a dangling wire disconnected from the system -- "it was hard". Zoe said, "to make yourself get up every morning and put on your pantyhose" all the same.

Some just gave up and withdrew from the system. Catherine was one who left. After trying teaching in a high school, administration in a government department, then program development in a human resource department, she finally decided to work on her own. "I don't fit in to organizations at all," she stated staunchly. "I'm a bulldozer. . . . I see the situation without the problem. When I decide to do something, I do it, and I do it my way. I put my heart into it, whatever it takes. . . . Work isn't a separate part of my life, it is my life. . . . Organizations have a rigid paradigm. I get bored. I get fed up with the regulations. Why do we have to do it this way?"

When some felt no sufficient fit with their work or workplace, when they felt that they were in an intolerable situation, they eventually gave up. Elana told her story of a job in city planning that she took early in her career, requiring a lot of math and physics. Elana liked chiefly to work with people, and as she looked back on the situation now she described it as a "wrong fit":

> There's something I need to learn and I can't learn it. I know that I'm never going to be in sync with this organization. I'm the wrong person for this job. You can be the wrong person for a variety of reasons, the least of which is knowledge. I think it's a fit in terms of your behaviors and attitudes and values that can put you apart from the group. -- Elana

The work and people around her demanded expertise and skills that Elana didn't have and didn't think she would ever develop. As she struggled to make sense of the expectations the work demanded of her, comparing herself to the people around her while protecting herself from fear and failure, she gradually realized that her basic needs for self-fulfillment were not going to be met in this job, and that she would end up spending much time and energy learning things she wasn't really remotely interested in pursuing. From a perspective of positionality, she began her work in this knowledge community by attempting to negotiate a tolerable position for herself regardless of the dissonance she sensed. Despite these feelings of not-belonging, her patience and experience with unfamiliar challenges helped her persist, trusting that the lack of fit she intuited was simply a disjuncture that she could learn her way through. She was spirited by hope, an optimistic belief that she would soon find a clue, a sign, some loose thread of coming-to-know, of coming-to-belong she could follow that would eventually lead her into the web of the community. After a few months of fruitless struggle and no change in her position as unhappy outsider, she acknowledged that there was no position for her in this community and she resigned the job.

Kirsten also left a community of gourmet food sales reps when she finally acknowledged, "I'm just not cut out for this." She looked at the people around her who thrived as successful fits with the work, who enjoyed the "wheel and deal. I'm a service-oriented person. I learned I'm not a hard-sell person. I'm just not interested in it and I'm not good at it."

When Catherine decided she could no longer work as an employee inside organizational workplaces, she founded her own consulting firm which now employs several associates. Now she created her own systems where she fit into a central position. She was needed by her clients, as an architect of change. These needs created projects, for which she pulled together people who interconnected like a web to get the job done. She didn't exert power over people, she said, but she tried to create situations that invited people to come together temporarily in projects that generated power.

In these stories of Zoe, Elana, Kirsten, and Catherine the individual's power asserting itself can be heard strongly. These women often moved from one organization to another. They determined for themselves where they fit best, positioning themselves according to their own preferences and needs to be an organizational outsider or insider, adaptor or innovator, inquirer or problem-solver. Despite the stance of critical theorists which for some includes the assumption that organizational and societal structures determine the extent and nature of an individual's agency, and thus her participation and learning in any community, this was not the belief of the individuals with whom I spoke. Some might argue that these individuals were in fact deluded, blind to their own oppression by both externally exerted structures (control mechanisms such as regulations and surveillance) as well as those societal structures which they have internalized (totalizing beliefs such as singular ideologies and limited assumptions). But when individuals claimed that they enjoy the freedom of choice and movement which allowed them to seek a position they preferred intuitively, to find ways of changing this position or changing their community if they wanted to before relinquishing their autonomy, it would be spurious to insist that they were in fact being controlled by forces beyond their perspective.

Positionality, scope of responsibility, and perspective

The focus of this section is on women's perspective relative to their workplace community, as this influences their learning. Workplace learning literature often stresses the need to help people become "systems thinkers" (Senge, 1990) so that they can see the larger patterns that connect their actions and choices with others'. This is a very particular way of viewing and listening to the world, shaping an individual's practice, knowledge, and ways of learning.

This systems perspective, what many of these women called "big picture thinking" appears to be fundamentally related to positionality. The global perspective is the vista from a manager's position and purview of responsibility, and therefore is often most aligned with the manager's sense of personal purpose within the organization. This section explores how and why these women moved towards big picture thinking, and how it affected their learning and work.

The job definition and its positionality

The job position itself, created by the intersection of disposition and sense of identity with the organizational conditions, lights and shapes workplace learning in particular ways. First, the women often saw certain things from certain positions, as when Zoe was promoted to the position managing a large department and suddenly had folded into her gaze a whole new vista of organizational activity, or when Kirsten became aware of the irreconcilable differences between her two colleagues' thinking styles when she found herself shaping and being shaped into a position as mediator between them. Second, the women often felt sufficiently protected in certain positions to extend themselves, in an effort to learn, into actions that exposed them to potential failure or to aggressive others. Denise's story of blossoming in her apprentice-like position under the tutelage and support of an encouraging and daring female supervisor is an example of positive mentorship; Nancy's story of being positioned with equality in a group of dedicated, close-knit and "maverick" professionals is an example of how a small caring community enhances an individual's learning. Third, the women often felt sufficiently honored in certain positions and respected by others to open themselves to the hazard of new ideas and perspectives without feeling their personal authority or identity threatened.

Coming to a position of "big picture" perspective

Marilyn was at first bogged down in her own community, one so divided by people's conflicting priorities and implicit personal agendas which side-tracked them from the big decisions they needed to make. But she found that when she stepped out to visit other communities, that the problems she faced were suddenly put in perspective as part of a much bigger pattern:

> I think I learned to find out, you need to find out the whole picture. Let's not just look at our world, but let's look at the whole world and see if this has happened before, who are the players, who can help us, where are the resources we can tie into. That is a cornerstone of my practice. What is the whole picture here?

When she served on the commission boards, Sarah not only learned the mechanics of how the whole organization really operated, she also learned respect for the people working in various aspects of her organization. These were truly dedicated people, she believed, who worked long overtime and produced high-quality work. She felt excited to be part of this, she wanted her own work to contribute to the network -- and now she was beginning the long process of overhauling her own programs so that they conformed with the organization's whole direction.

Many of the women I spoke with in this study had experienced an expansion in their thinking and their sense of self through workplace experience that helped them develop what they tended to call "big picture" thinking. Marilyn found that because she looked at the whole picture, she didn't accept roadblocks. She never accepted being told 'this can't happen" because she knew if she searched she would find alternatives. There was always a creative solution out there in the larger world beyond the parameters of this problem.

Zoe talked about her promotion in the college to an administrative position managing the continuing education program as a peak time in her career -- partly because it was a positive learning experience and partly because it was energizing, fulfilling work. At first she was excited by the new awareness that the regular daytime programs, in which she had been formerly immersed, are just one part of the "whole picture" of the college's educational work, that there was this whole other wonderful area of activity going on to which she had been oblivious. Her excitement was sustained in the tremendous learning curve required by the new job -- budgeting, assessing community needs, mediating between very different groups with different interests of which faculty, her former community, was only one of many. Her perspectives had shifted -- old dilemmas now lost prime spot in the arena of her focus, and became rather small in this new big picture. Now the evaluations filled out by course participants were not just something to handle personally as part of an unfolding relationship between instructor and student, as they had been in her former classroom world, but were valuable information for course planning and modifying. Now she was responsible for solving the problems of running a cost-recovery educational operation. She found it empowering to be able to transcend one part of the work and see how it fitted the wider system. Zoe said of herself, "I was always a terribly shy person. But as I took on managerial functions, I managed to move beyond that. I functioned well, and my picture of myself changed."

This finding was echoed in the stories of the women in this study. Like Zoe, Liz became aware of the "big picture" of her corporation when she was given a job requiring her to take responsibility for managing part of this picture:

> Responsibility increases your self-confidence. You see yourself doing things you didn't know you could do, and doing them well. Then you get more self-confident and you begin to see your own power and you have some more success, and so you feel you can take on new challenges. And it keeps going like that, you see? It keeps spiralling upwards. You feel better about yourself and so you want to do more. I really believe that that's the most important thing, how you feel about yourself.

Big picture thinking is exciting, adventurous; it broadens one's scope of practice. One sees the frontier spreading far away from the snarls of mundane, everyday work activity. But it belongs to people who sense they have been granted the freedom, capability, and authority to create visions and make decisions.

How big picture thinking evolves

For these women, big picture thinking evolved with the growth of a career. One of two things seemed to happen to stretch a person's perspective from local to more global in the workplace: either she reached a saturation of comfort with her current job and began to look outside her own context in the continual search for challenge; or she was catapulted into a job like management which demands a broad perspective. Like Zoe and Liz, Carla was preoccupied at first with "learning the ropes" -- developing sufficient competence to excel in the tasks immediately confronting her. For Carla these were the mechanics of learning how to run a successful bank branch. Then when she was comfortable in her management role, completely familiar with all aspects of operations and performing as well as possible, she looked farther afield for more challenge. During our last talk she expressed interest in the district directions, in the bank-wide selection and implementation of technology, and in the decisions made at national headquarters -- "I've got a few ideas of my own."

Carolyn was preoccupied at the beginning of her job with finding ways to make the training interesting, to make it work to yield results. As she developed confidence in her own ability and familiarity with her work, she gradually began to look beyond her training room to the struggles in their own work environments of the individuals participating in her employee development programs. She began to care about follow-up to the programs, about ways to support people through the changes of a learning process, in their own contexts. She became more aware of the model set by her supervisors, whom she respected, in being attuned to the larger organizational needs. Carolyn wrote a note to me on one of her transcripts: "A change for me was now I need to understand the big picture and how does everything fit together. Then how can I get others to see beyond themselves, see their situation from other angles." Listening and empathy were key to her work. But whereas "I used to be always for the person, now I'm for the organization, working for the whole system." She thought more and more about new ways to evaluate her programs and follow-up with the participants, examining how the programs actually benefited the whole organization.

Carolyn's expanding shift in perspective evolved through a combination of growth in comfort and skill and clear examples from role models, which allowed her to continue to seek 'why' questions that led her in an ever-widening radius outwards from the sphere of her own daily communicative interactions in her own workspace, to others' workspaces, then finally to a consideration of the links between all these people and workplaces that was the organization. What drove her to seek out "the big picture" was caring, which was deeply rooted in the strong and authentic interpersonal connections she established first. There was a difference between simply seeing "the big picture", and committing oneself, as Carolyn indicates, to "working *for* the whole." [emphasis added]

Connection to the big picture is also empowering. In the work they are enacting, the women carry within them the strength of the larger community. Elizabeth only began really feeling stuck when she realized that the project her team was working on was mired in details and fractured into debates about regulations and procedures. The work had lost connection with the big picture of a clear vision for the whole organization.

Positionality, community connectedness and learning in the workplace

Whether they were most comfortable positioning themselves as Innovators or as Adaptors, whether they preferred to be inside, nested securely within the folds of the community, or outside, bound irresistibly to the community, gravity-like in their own orbit, whatever manner of position they sought, ultimately the women desired connectedness in their workplace communities. This was partly an issue of "fit" with the actual tasks and style of the work and the values and beliefs of the community, but more importantly for the women I spoke with, an issue of relationships within the community. When this level of close connectedness was valued so highly, the women were highly sensitive to the most subtle cues that the threads binding workplace relationships were becoming frayed.

These women were acutely aware whenever they felt a lack of connectedness within their workplace community. As a senior manager in a provincial government department, Elana found that more and more she was lonely, without connective relationships linking her with people who understood. "Where are all the women my age?" she asked. "Have they all left the workplace?" Elizabeth's growing bitterness at having stayed so long in an organization that didn't fit her need for creative freedom was partially fueled by her sense of alienation: "I feel like I'm cut off...Sometimes you just need a little bit of a push or a collegial support structure to share stuff, someone to bounce the ball with, to work out what has to be done. That isn't here."

Although many of these women performed the bulk of their work alone, even when working in an organization, they indicated that a sense of connection with others helped them learn mainly through affirmation of their efforts. These women seemed to seek people who would listen to them, and people with whom they could 'play'. Listening has been explored extensively elsewhere in this document. Play was interactive and social; it encourages holistic, creative, spontaneous approaches to work-learning that often produce the innovations that businesses seem to seek so avidly. When women say, like Elizabeth, "I like to have someone to bounce the ball with..." they are usually referring to play with ideas. When a woman felt distanced, dis-connected from others, she may be deprived of an essential element for learning.

The following sub-sections explore patterns evident in these women's different movements within the various workplace communities they belonged to. Sometimes women moved from connectedness with their community to alienation, sometimes they chose to disconnect themselves from their community, sometimes they moved from alienation to connectedness, and sometimes they found a position of genuine interdependency with a workplace community.

Moving from community connectedness to alienation within the workplace

Sarah liked an adaptive position within a community, liked to be given directives to do something, then left to figure out in her own way how to do it and who to do it with. The informal team worked well -- lots of quick chats, sharing snips of information, asking each other questions, *knowing what was going on.*. Her frustration with her work situation began when the new director shared neither information and direction, nor himself. She felt cut off, adrift. Soon she began to see the work situation not as her relationships, as she had before, but as an artificial game. She demanded, "What I need to know is, have the rules of the game changed? Then I'll change my expectations. I won't expect team. I won't expect cooperation. I won't expect to be consulted. I'm documenting the things happening that I found disturbing." She retreated from human connectedness to a position of self-protection. Although she learned to be more "self-directed" and now decides what to do on her own, she was neither as satisfied with her work conditions nor learning as much when she felt alienated from the sense of community.

Women in this study told many stories of dis-connecting or distancing as an unhappy movement for them in a community. Sometimes they became aware of thinning or fraying connections that positions them at a distance from others. Sometimes a critical incident disconnected them from the organization. Sometimes the nature of their work kept them at a distance from a community, isolated and lonely. But sometimes they deliberately distanced themselves from the community, despite their discomfort with such a position.

Independent contractors may feel distanced, cut off, because they don't have a dwelling place inside a particular community. Wendy as a free-lance contractor generally enjoyed her freedom to schedule her career preparation seminars and course development projects around the needs of her family. But she was having a hard time coping with the dis-connectedness of her position. She was treated cordially by her clients, but she was not part of their community. She just came in, did her "thing", then went home. She returned often to this theme: "I really miss that sense of being part of something, that sense of belonging, that sense of being part of something greater . . ." Why? Did she not experience the connectedness of relationships among the participants in her seminars? Yes of course, but "afterwards there's no one to share it with. I never know how well I'm doing, not really. I don't have people to bounce ideas with, laugh with. It's a daily thing you need" -- once-a-month networking groups just don't do it.

Being connected, having people around, also means having listeners, an audience which makes the fragments of everyday life into stories that can be owned. Carolyn told of the time she had just successfully finished a difficult program, working with supervisors who typically were not readily cooperative during in-house workshops, not always willing to learn from a facilitating employee whose job classification was lower than their own. "I was so excited," she said, "I raced around the office to find someone to tell." But they'd all gone home that day, and there was no one to hear about the struggles and the triumph of the day -- "I was so disappointed," said Carolyn for the second time.

Often the distances among people in a workplace are reflected in the landmarks defining the physical space. Kirsten's stories of the distribution of parking stalls and the walled partitions in her office, mentioned earlier in this document, are cases in point of sorting people. People were being "bumped" from the underground parkade to outside stalls, some with plug-ins and some without. Naturally the classification hierarchy dictated who got what, but some staff were "wrangling" a preferred stall for themselves and thus improving their position. It was an issue, although the director was oblivious or chose not to be aware of it. Kirsten also explained how the walled partitions in the office actually symbolized the communication barriers between two units in the department who worked independently, but on the same problems of employee training and development -- leading to competition and friction. What she saw was "a lot of talking at cross-purposes . . . . We ask for answers and they go off on tangents it seems." The 'other' group brought in a Plain Language program without taking some preliminary steps that Kirsten's unit had recommended. When the program developed problems and came under criticism from the rest of the organization, Kirsten's unit produced the documentation of their own cautions. What did she learn? "Watch your back and cover your butt," said Kirsten. "It's awful, it's counter-productive, but unfortunately it's the way of life here." Sarah explain that the "politics" of her own social services center has divided departments into 'this side' and 'that side' which do not communicate, and share neither information, resources, nor creativity in solution-finding. "Did you notice where the carpet changed colour?" she laughed. And indeed, the new carpet installed for the 'front side' of offices ended abruptly halfway down the hall before one reaches the back offices.

Choosing to dis-connect from the community

Elana usually sought to position herself securely inside her workplace community. But in the current organizational upheavals her position made her vulnerable to parallel emotional upheavals. She began to feel like one of the victims because she was entwined in the rigging of the sinking ship. This was when she deliberately yanked herself into a more distanced position. "If I can become an observer again, if I can pull back and find an ability to laugh at it, saying, 'This was interesting. What did it mean?' . . . " -- then she could protect herself, maintain her own emotional stability. Laughing at it helped her regain that balance.

Elizabeth said, "It's hard work learning not to take yourself too seriously. You've got to let go. Be at peace." This was Elizabeth's attitude after many years of struggling with feeling no-fit in her workplace community. Sometimes she ignored it and simply severed her personal commitment to her work. Sometimes she confronted people or regulations in the community, then suffered ostracization. Now, after being twice suddenly parachuted out of projects working with people she enjoyed in creative pursuits that were exciting and fulfilling, she was deliberately distancing herself from the community while continuing her work. But "if an opportunity comes by, I'll walk", she said.

Like Elana and Elizabeth, other women discovered that a position of distance from their workplace community helped them reconcile particular issues of non-fit. They managed to sustain this position even while other parts of their work or their selves were closely enmeshed with their community. They could live with the distance, usually by laughing at the disparity such that it was removed from them as a serious threat. For instance, Sarah learned to accept and live with the power hierarchies which dictated policies in the Catholic church that she found incomprehensible. A program she worked with enthusiastically to train youth ministers to be independent thinkers and creative change agents in the parishes was successfully squashed by "the powers that be" -- presumably because of complaints from certain priests used to passive obedience ("Yes Father, no Father, three bags full, Father"). The "numbers game" of some parishes dictated the fate of the new youth minister. What counted was whether the numbers of kids in church went up, not the total personal and spiritual development of teenagers that the youth ministers were trained to develop.

All of these issues represented a particular disjuncture, an area of bad fit, between women's own intentions and values and those of her workplace community. They deplored it, they lived with it, they laughed at it, they sometimes blunted their enthusiasm against its planks, but they didn't adopt an open learning stance to this disjuncture. Neither did they necessarily give up and choose to leave the organization because of a fit problem. Sometimes women simply chose to position themselves apart from the disjuncture: they cut it loose from their intentions, their field of concern which defined their own purpose and sense of what was worthwhile. They didn't take it seriously. They didn't learn from it.

Moving from alienation to community connectedness

Audrey's story was an interesting example of positionality relative to a knowledge community as this has changed over the lifespan of her career. When she began teaching kindergarten on a native reserve, she and her baby daughter numbered among a handful of white people -- called Moonias, white flesh. The natives played bingo, but she stayed home.The long winter in isolation she thinks wasn't a problem, she was frantic keeping up with the demands of her new job. Nights were hours and hours of preparation, and days were noisy emotional rollercoasters. Showering the children, scrambling back and forth soaking wet from the boys' to the girls' room assisting five-year-olds who weren't used to bathing rituals -- "one of them was sliding around on the broken tile floor and cut his bottom. I had to tape him up. Scared the hell out of me. The classroom next door -- the teacher there lost it long ago -- she screams at the kids. They shit in the corner to get her back."

But in Audrey's classroom, the kindergarten was to her like a world removed from the rest. She explained that she cared genuinely about the children, and she was free to create with them a safe, loving, fun place. Every day when they left, there was a handshake or a hug even though touching was hard for some. And they forgave each other -- no matter what happened. She didn't care that the other teachers called the kindergarten "those people over there" or that she heard sometimes about catty remarks and sabotage (she was given a load of old Grade Four textbooks to work with one year). As long as she worked hard and helped the children, she thought nothing else really mattered.

Effort and results were not enough, she discovered. She should have attended to her position in the school and in the community. When she as a single mother got romantically involved with the principal, a divorcee, she was ostracized by the community of the school and the greater community surrounding it. She said, "I learned about the cruelty of small community justice, that you have to keep your nose really clean. I learned that smiling at people and talking to people is really important as a community member, it's part of your job." At first she didn't understand what was happening -- this was her personal business, after all. But when people refused to give her the rides she depended on to get to the grocery store, she realized how naive she'd been. "When I arrived I just said, Here I am. That was very stupid. You have to be very careful about position in a new situation. I wasn't taking responsibility for what I wanted."

The relationship broke off and Audrey continued in the school. Now she became more involved, working with groups like a Native Teachers society despite the snipes about "the white donkey." She campaigned for computers, she worked with others to start staff socials and gift-giving days. She involved other teachers in getting a "whole language" program started, and wrote proposals to get the materials they needed. She began to understand how the community operated -- "the politics", and she began to understand their reasons for casting her out. She said, "You have pain but if you come out of it not totally broken you learn -- how to forgive others, how not to judge people. You learn to think about what you say before you say it. There's much more going on than you see." Ahead of her were many more years of teaching on that reserve filled with joy and pain -- the children who sometimes lived with her and still remember wonderful dress-up parties at teacher's house, their goosebump excitement when they saw their poems and stories in print, the play where kids were so shy that the lead actress hid in the curtains and the lead actor played the entire thing with his back to the audience, the multiple suicides each year. One year something snapped. Audrey left teaching and left the reserve. She returned to painting and started her own educational consulting firm.

The Audrey who once worked as a single cell, not caring about and oblivious to her position in the knowledge community outside the network binding her to the children, became aware of her positionality, then worked to change it. She opened more to the people around her, listened to them, relaxed towards them as colleagues rather than opposition. Now she says, "It was learning to like myself. What's inside is mirrored outside. The important thing for me is to encounter people and harmonize, to resonate like in singing. The combination is beautiful, two voices singing together. It's vital to how we work, how we achieve. Once I was more relaxed, we had great things happen, unbelievable things, in that school."

Choosing interdependent connectivity in a workplace community

Working with others is a potential opportunity to learn how to gradually nestle into a position within a community that is mutually dependent. Fran reflected that her early years were more self-focused -- "you're so caught up in your own ego." Perhaps positioning is more of a concern when one is young and insecure and eager to prove oneself in a new community. Perhaps this is why so much more stake is placed on performance of technical skills when one is inexperienced, like Nancy who was terrified to give her first intravenous when she started work at the hospital: "Am I going to have to figure everything out by trial and error?" she thought in despair at the time. Later she approached new situations with more confidence. If she didn't know how to do what she was supposed to, she knew she could figure it out, or make mistakes and ask questions with the serenity of someone who had already proven her own competence to herself.

Many of the women in this study described a point in their career, usually after some time in a particular workplace when the technical skills and the relationship dynamics were somewhat familiar, where they developed an appreciation not just for a few role models, but for many other people around them, as worthy of respect. Carla said, "For the first few years you're just trying to figure out how to run the branch." Perhaps while these women were mastering the instrumental competencies that they need to survive in their jobs, they maintained relatively tight boundaries defining their positionality as protectively distant from the general population of all others in the workplace except perhaps for a few trusted coaches. While they were in the process of establishing an identity positioned as equally competent and knowing as others on the job, they were not so open to admit failure and confusion. Paradoxically, women were young or new in a job, some said they thought they knew more than the experienced people around them. They may have positioned themselves distantly, and more closed than open to learn from others, because they secretly believed their own way was much better. Wendy remembered when she first started realizing that the other staff at the addiction treatment centre were truly competent: "It took me a while to look at what it was they were doing that worked, instead of what they weren't doing, to realize that I'm right a lot of time but not all the time." After years gradually moving up in positions of responsibility in the chemical corporation she worked with, Liz said she realized that, "You don't change what's around you, you change yourself to feel better. The key is to accept others, which allows you to be more accepting of yourself."

How do people relax the barriers separating their positions from others sufficiently to become open to and develop appreciation for others' perspectives? Carla's and Wendy's stories seemed to indicate this was part of natural growing over time, as people became more competent, confident in their own skill and on others' respect for them, and relaxed their anxiety about maintaining their positionality relative to others. Feeling connected to others, feeling listened to and liked, even cared for, helps some women relax their positionality. A peak learning for Elizabeth, she claimed, was when she was sent up to manage a rural northern office of her government department. At first she judged the people working around her harshly: they were "orangutangish", with fat expense accounts and company vehicles. But gradually, she said she began to learn to like these people. She began to appreciate their gifts and skills. They started to talk to her, listen to her. She found herself feeling empathy for their issues, and caring about helping them. This was when she said she first learned to like people, particularly people in her workworld which up till then had been characterized in her mind by their "stupidity, laziness, and entitlement mentalities." She also began to like herself more.

Like Elizabeth, Kirsten opened to the perspectives of others when she felt secure in a meaningful niche respective to these others, a dwelling place specially for her in the workplace that others acknowledged. Kirsten said her place was as "a balancer." She valued balance, and found herself consistently adopting a position to balance her co-workers. If one consultant was analytic and detailed and the other global and holistic, Kirsten would act as referee and mediator. She appreciated and was attuned to the unique gifts of her colleagues. Zoe, for example, was very good at seeing things that Kirsten missed, but because Zoe was so analytic Kirsten found herself "filling the hole, seeing more of the big picture. We're a very good balance for each other."

When the women positioned themselves connectively with others, listening, empathizing, reaching out to link their own actions with their colleagues' efforts towards a meaningful end, they often began to value their perspectives. They stretched out when the strength of their own position and their identity within this position was so secure it was almost invisible. When people they worked with knew who they were and valued them -- they didn't need to prove themselves through exercise of voice or performance of skill. They seemed to feel a legitimate sense of place.

Positionality: Power, Participation, Place, and Personal Agency

The women's positionality influenced their workplace learning in four main ways. First, the way a woman positioned herself towards a single other person in an interpersonal communicative encounter seemed to determine how she received that other, and whether this reception was the open, trusting, inquiring posture of learning that "otherness" creates, or something more adversarial and self-protective. Second, the way a woman positioned herself in the workplace community itself appeared to shape her learning. Women often sought what they called a "fit" with a workplace community, a blend of personal values, purposes, styles of thinking and communication with those of the community's participants. When this fit was achieved, many women seemed more able to relax, risk, listen, open themselves to people and new knowledge and pour their energy into the creative challenges of learning new work. Community position determined a person's movements within that workplace, and thus her access to and nature of participation in certain experiences that had learning potential. Community position also helped shape an individual's perspective on certain events, policies, relationships, and thus helped shape learning.

Third, a woman's workplace position in terms of her scope of responsibility and therefore her view of concern on workplace activity often significantly influenced the focus of her learning. In particular, this section will address how positionality affects the much-lauded "systems thinking" perspective and ability to understand "multiple perspectives" in the workplace. Fourth and finally, the degree of relational, intellectual, psychological and ethical connectedness a woman found with a workplace community appeared to be a significant dimension in her personal growth, her flexibility and resilience to adapt to change, and her general enthusiasm for and engagement in workplace learning.

Senge (1990) claims that in a workplace organization people choose to adopt a position of inquiry or advocacy respective to others. Either they seek to truly understand by inquiring into the other's perspectives, or they seek to defend themselves by advocating their own position. In fact there are many more than two alternatives to choose from in positioning self towards someone else in the workplace in a particular situation. Thomas (1976) shows five different positions people in workplaces adopt in their interpersonal relations: accommodative, assertive, dominant, collaborative, or assimilative. These categories help raise questions about positionality in learning. What influences the choice to position oneself to another deferentially (ready to learn), confrontationally (ready to defend against learning), authoritatively (ready to teach), collaboratively (ready to mutually share), or indifferently (ready to endure and forget)?

Positionality can be understood as the place in which people find or situate themselves at a particular point in time, in a particular socio-political-cultural context, experiencing a particular situation. Positionality is constructed through the unfolding of relationships, the subject positions and flow of power in these relational moments contextualized in space, time, and history. Foucault (1988) has described the significance of power that flows through the societal construction and regulatory uses of knowledge. In examining the biographies of these women, my focus is the personal act of coming to know and its relationship to the act of negotiating position between what is perceived as self and what is perceived to be the other that becomes the text of knowing. For the women, the other was a knowledge community in which they sought membership, a role model, a friend, a disjuncture or dilemma. Women's interrelations with these others comprised the ongoing flow of everyday discursive participation that Plumb (1995) calls the "perpetually vulnerable and risk-filled process of communicative action." (p.243). These interrelationships between them and what conventional pedagogy might call their "opportunities to learn" in the workplace -- experiences, people, dilemmas, and contexts confronting me, often overlapped and unfolded simultaneously in situations of multiple complex and moving relations.

Critical theorists remind us that these power relations are asymmetrical, and are often structured by class, race, and gender. Of course, many other characteristics distinguish individuals and likely influence the power dynamics of their mutual relationship in a particular sociocultural context: able-bodiedness, self-perception and confidence, adherence to dominant cultural norms, age, perceived capabilities, education, experience, credibility, perspectives, preferences, and certain dispositional traits. These women also thought of their positionality as more outside or more inside, more central or more peripheral than, more distant or more intimate with, the other. Or they approached position in terms of service: who was serving whom? who did they believe should be served? Their positionality respective to another knowledge authority, disjuncture, dilemma, or behavior was nested within their macro-position to the general community in which this micro-positioning must unfold.

Positionality and participation in a community of practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) observe that all workplace learning is "legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice" (p. 3). A "community of practice" represents a negotiated set of relations among persons, their actions, and the world over time and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A new entrant to a community is positioned on the periphery, but must still strive to emulate participation from this peripheral position. The learner participates always as an apprentice in this community, absorbing and being absorbed in that culture, while developing the skills to share in the decision-making governing that culture. Participation increases from peripheral to fuller participation as the learner strengthens decision-making influence within the community of practice. Heaney (1995) has extended the concept of legitimate peripheral participation to solve the problem of uni-dimensionality of Lave's theory; he shows how individuals participate simultaneously in multiple overlapping knowledge communities.

Two significant points offered by the theory of legitimate peripheral participation are first that learning occurs always with/in a *community* that produces and uses knowledge, and second that a worker's participation as it is linked to the meaningful work of this community is the impulse and core of that worker's learning. Learning and doing, situated socially, are regarded by cultural anthropologists such as Lave and Wenger as simultaneous and almost synonymous processes. Jarvis (1987) insists that the socio-cultural context is critical to the kinds of experiences available to a learner and the way those experiences are processed: "learning is not just a psychological process that happens in splendid isolation from the world in which the learners lives, but is intimately related to the world, and affected by it" (p.11).

These theories of situated cognition are useful in considering the influence of context and community on the women's construction of knowledge in the workplace. Their knowledge was situated or anchored in their consciousness in the actual activity, using the particular tools, within the specific community in which they constructed that knowledge (Brown , Collins and Duguid, 1989). Context, both of the immediate practical situated activity and of the larger environment shaping and being shaped by the locus of practice, has been recognized theoretically and demonstrated in this study to be an undertheorized and complex set of phenomena in practice-based learning.

These women's stories show the dynamic multi-layered contradictory energies of context, and indicate the learner's impact on that context through her act of coming-to-know. Lave (1993) writes, "Doing and knowing are inventive open-ended processes of improvisation with the social, material, and experiential resources at hand" (p. 13). Context itself, suggests Lave, is often regarded somewhat simplistically as an entity, a fixed, if holistic, container. Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) argue that "situations might be said to co-produce knowledge through activity" (p. 32). The sense of a task and its meaning cannot be defined outside the activity in which the problem is posed and the actor's assumptions about the relevant premises for action. The women's invention occurred according to opportunities presented at particular moments by the structure and interactions and tools available in a particular context. Within this context, the women negotiated their own places for working and living, making meaning, and relating their meaning to that embodied in the community's creative energies and labor.

Positionality and a sense of place

A position is a dwelling-place, a site to stand upon and live within and call one's own and view the world from and take into one's identity. Heidegger (1977) describes how *bauen* , or 'to build', also means *ich bin* and *du bist* -- I am and you are. *Bauen* originates in the old High German word *buan* , which means 'to dwell'. Dwelling is then the essence of being on earth. We build dwelling places for ourselves by creating spaces within the fourfold: earth and sky, divinities and mortals. "We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is, because we are dwellers." (Heidegger, 1977, p. 326). When the women created a new space, that is, called into existence or erected boundaries among the elements already existing, this new space became its own location for perspective, for understanding the world. The space "gathers to itself in its own way earth and sky, divinities and mortals" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 331). The space does not close off, but liberates; the boundaries are the beginning of the unfolding of something new.

These women began to build a dwelling place for themselves when they first entered any new knowledge community, whether its source of cohesion was formal theory (such as a professional discipline) or a temporal-spatial location (such as a workplace organization). A job was not just a set of activities, it was a position itself with its own role and responsibilities. The women often saw themselves, their workplace identity, and for some of them even their personal identities as entwined with that position title and function. When they negotiated their positionality with each new situation or interpersonal encounter in the workplace, they often relied on the formal position of their job titles to dictate the flow of power in their relationships and experiences. But the women also watched and listened, compared themselves to others, sought connections, and participated in a series of complex interpersonal negotiations to make their own dwelling places in an organization. The process of calling into presence this new position in a workplace community was a learning process.

Positionality and interests

Another dimension to negotiating a dwelling place in a workplace community is the positioning of interests. Cervero and Wilson (1994) define ***interests*** as "a complex set of dispositions, goals, values, desires, and expectations that lead people to act in certain ways and position themselves in a particular manner when confronted with situations in which they must act." (p. 122-23). They differentiate among three types of interests that function to influence the way power is exercised in learning enterprises. Expressed interests are what people reveal to be their preferences. Ideal interests are a function of people's ethical beliefs about what goals are legitimately just, and people don't always verbalize these. Real interests are the practical norms that govern what actually happens. These interests work inside relationships of power. Interests are negotiated, influenced by and influencing the construction of power relations. To extend the case made by Cervero and Wilson about educational planning to all activities that unfold in the workplace, negotiation of interests is a central construct of the daily interactions forming organizational life. Negotiating interests is fundamentally a political act, and determines what people do, hear, say, decide, comply with, and thus what they learn.

When the women sensed a basic difference of interests dividing them from others with whom they were to work, they approached the exercise of positionality cautiously. The political frame which now governed their actions and speech was not an open posture but a defensive approach. As Morgan (1986) implies, the political stance is only one metaphor through which to view an organization, whether as an insider jostling for position in that organization or as an outsider studying its culture and systemic relations. But when the women allowed this political metaphor to govern their actions, they were not learning from the other. They may have been learning strategies to protect themselves and their interests against the other's threats, but they were not constructing the knowledge that their life intentions of service, building community, and finding creative challenge compelled them to seek.

Positionality and personal agency

Positionality extends beyond power relations among people in the workplace, important as this dimension of positionality is. The women also positioned themselves relative to tasks and dilemmas facing them. Their positionality was also influenced by their personal sense of agency which was linked to their conception of identity. Sometimes they positioned themselves as more powerful than a task confronting and challenging me -- "I can do this!" Other times they viewed themselves as less powerful than the demands of a dilemma -- "I just crumbled, I was overwhelmed, I didn't know where to start." Any task or dilemma that forces people into uncertain realms requires them to learn, and thus their ability to learn from these experiences is significantly affected by the degree of confidence or helplessness they feel from their position relative to the task.

In positioning themselves towards a task or dilemma, the women made a judgment. This judgment was partly based on their life intentions: how important is this task in the scheme of what I've decided I will have or will do? Is this task part of my life seeking? Is it worth the possibly painful blows to my self, is it worth the expenditure of energy? To what extent will I surrender my self to this task or dilemma or project, which has an energy and structure all its own?

This is a key point to understand about the function of positionality in workplace learning: the knower's pursuit is governed in part by her position to her own intentionality. This is a question of degree of commitment, of willingness to sublimate the self in a cause transcending personal interests and the immediate needs of the ego. Naturally, this "willingness" is a complicated issue. No single worldly intention can command the focus of most women's full attention and energy at a particular period of life, no one worldly purpose can outweigh the myriad responsibilities to be balanced, no worldly call can expect to command uncritical naive devotion.

The women's judgment of the worthiness and knowability of the object of knowing was also partly based on how they viewed themselves as knowers in the world. Some were more continuously open to learn from what confronted them, while some attempted more to control the object of knowing. Some sought more to raise questions about experience, some to look for ways to resolve questions. Different women viewed themselves as knowledge-producers, knowledge-reproducers, knowledge-consumers, or knowledge-resistors. In certain situations some thought of themselves as knowledge-deficient, others as impervious to new knowledge. The oft-cited study entitled "Women's ways of knowing" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986) claims that only a small percentage of women see themselves as "constructive knowers", positioning themselves as active participants in the construction of reality that is their knowledge. But most other women, according to the 1986 study, position themselves apart from a world that they conceive as pre-existing their efforts to know. "Silent knowers" are women who do not see themselves as capable of knowing anything except by passive reception of the world's teachings. "Subjective knowers" are women who disregard the world's teachings. "Separate knowers" are women who disregard their own knowings; they position themselves as studiers of the world, coming to know what is unalterable and impersonal rather than viewing themselves as worthy of questioning it or capable of changing it. Thus the women's positionality as knowers was determined not only by the openness of their stance towards experience, but also by their degree of agency in actively constructing new knowledge.

Positionality depends on initial perceptions of objects, events, and people as these are related to self. From these initial perceptions, the women negotiated positionality with the other that constructed their knowing: the task, dilemma, person, or community that they chose to concern them. These negotiations created a flow of power binding the women with/in a relationships that were dynamic, and ultimately determined their ability and willingness to learn through interaction with the other.

Positionality of tact

Positionality is thus determined partly by capacity for discernment and receptiveness to new and potentially frightening meaning. Steiner (1989) argues that, in people's capacity to host and engage with new meaning, there functions a moral intuition which he describes as "tact." Tact is the "ways in which we allow ourselves to touch or not to touch, to be touched or not to be touched by the presence of the other. The issue is that of civility . . . towards the savour of things" (Steiner, 1989, p. 148). Steiner metaphorizes the act of making meaning as receiving a guest, with both yearning and fear that at once opens outward yet guards the dwelling of the individual. When the individual adopts a position towards the other of morality, courtesy, and perceptive trust, the other is brought inside, savoured. Steiner asks,

> What means have we to integrate that savour into the fabric of our own identity? We need a terminology which plainly articulates the intuition that an experience of communicated forms of meaning demands, fundamentally, a courtesy or tact of heart, a tact of sensibility and of intellection which are conjoined at their several roots. (Steiner, 1989, p. 148-149)

Uncannily, the notion of "tact" is also elaborated by van Manen (1991) as primary in the ongoing process of meaning-making that is learning. For van Manen, tact is the essence of the pedagogical relationship. "To exercise tact," he writes, "means to *see* a situation calling for sensitivity, to *understand* the meaning of what is seen, to *sense the significance* of this situation, to *know how and what* to do, and to actually *do* something right" (van Manen, 1991, p. 146). Tact is the practice of "otherness", the ability to overcome an orientation to the world that places self at the center of things, and to truly open up and experience the subjectivity of the other. This caring for the other is an embodied knowledge, a thoughtfulness felt, intuited and actively exercised as much as perceived intellectually. Van Manen (1991) points out that the possibility of such an understanding depends upon the individual's experience of the other's vulnerability. In terms of positionality, pedagogy unfolds in the ability and willingness of an individual to hear and be fully open to receive the presence of an other's being.

Van Manen's argument helps illuminate the positionality of the women learning in the workplace. Like the teacher's "tact" or openness to the learning child, the women instigated a pedagogical relationship when they encountered the other which constituted the learning moment of workplace practice -- the experience, document, superordinate, dilemma, or other text of experience. Following the reasoning of both van Manen and Steiner, the women's learning, or the shaping of the individual that began at the moment of this rendezvous, depended upon a position of tact, of full receiving into the self of this other's real presence, vulnerability, and meaning.

Positionality is about power: shared or negotiated, acknowledged or denied, expressed or repressed within a social nexus, a community of discourse, by its participants. Positionality maps the terrain of distance between subjects, including the spatial, temporal, tonal and textural qualities of that distance. Workers in an organization participate in a continuing assessment and adjustment of their self's position relative to other individuals in the organization, to the organization's ideological structures and culture, to their own knowledge and assumptions, to their bodies and to their workplace identities. Because knowledge and the cultural practice of coming-to-know is the expression of the interests, aims and goals of the knower (Habermas, 1972; Fay, 1976; Lather, 1991), positionality helps shape the knower's intention and the knower's response to the disjuncture triggering the knower's urge to know. Positionality determines the knower's awareness of the range of possible knowledge, her sense of freedom to produce or reconstruct knowledge, and her sense of agency to act on her knowledge.

Intention, Disjuncture, and Positionality: The Relationships

The three dimensions of continuous learning in the workplace identified in the analysis of the women's experiences form a gestalt. Learning in workplace experience is shaped by intention intersecting with disjuncture and positionality. Intentions, what women seek in life generally or in the experience in front of them specifically, determine what they wanted to know and accomplish and what they were interested in listening to, which directed their attention and engagement with experience. Disjuncture, or the fissure between what they already knew and what they were currently facing, sparked in them the question that alerted them to something they didn't know, and, depending on their seeking, propelled their impulse to know. Positionality, or the position they chose to take relative to the object of knowing, embraced the power dynamics of intersubjective situations, the woman's sense of self as knower and what sources of knowledge were considered trustworthy and credible, and her continuous construction and re-invention of identity through the positional decisions shaping the action of coming-to-know.

In the interrelationship of intention, disjuncture, and positionality is apparent a restless energy, a basic human impulse to keep seeking. This opposes conventional views of learning that people continue "the quest for certainty" even when they are aware that absolute meaning does not exist (Jarvis, 1992, p. 165), and that when people are in harmony with the world, they are not faced with the unknowns that prompt the questions leading them to create new knowledge. Only when people are "confronted with a situation with which their meaning system cannot cope, they are forced to ask questions, and disjuncture -- the need to seek meaning, to learn -- arises" (Jarvis, 1992, p. 165).

The women's intentions to seek were not limited so narrowly as Jarvis and like-minded theorists would suggest, dormant unless stimulated by situations unfamiliar to their existing meaning systems. On the contrary, these women exemplified a fundamental will to seek new knowledge as a basic orientation to all of their experience. They did not proceed through everyday life existing largely through habituated action until thrown into disequilibrium by a disjuncture; rather, they imaginatively constructed their very experiences as a search for knowledge, whether for knowledge of self, of others, of improved technical practice or new perspectives and beliefs. Their very intentions, the viewpoints that shaped their apprehension of reality, were intentions of seeking. In Jarvis's conception this condition of continual seeking would need to be described as a constant state of "disequilibrium", self-created by the individual as a way of acting upon the world. Such a description distorts the positive energy of "seeking" as a relegation to continuous hunger for the harmony of equilibrium. Popular nonfiction is dominated by gurus (such as Covey, 1989) encouraging a focus on self-discovery, 'healing', 'recovery' and a search for harmony and balance.

A certain current cultural appetite for such literature, exemplified by the preferred choices of "solace" readings described by some women in this study, may be a product of people's shattered trust in the stability of institutions, especially those employing them. Late twentieth-century North Americans are encouraged to tie their destinies into kerchiefs onto their backs and rail-ride the economic machinery, contenting themselves with temporary shanty dwellings along the way. But in the light of night fires they huddle around the bones of past, heeding those shamans who proclaim that "there's a place for us, somewhere a place for us." The late modern imagination is enticed to listen to dreams and ignore dreams, seek simplicity yet embrace complexity, swim with the sharks past the monsters under the bed, adhere to seven effective habits while seeking stewardship, guided by celestial angels and their prophecies of megatrends, ages and stages.

This depiction misrepresents somewhat the essential impulse to search. For these women this impulse seemed to be an important creative energy, the meaning-maker's energy which compels a participation in conscious experience that is linked to the beyond, the meaning beyond this moment, the objectification of this subjective experience that becomes continuously evolving knowledge. For them learning is not necessarily a path towards a secure place of 'knowing', but an ongoing process of continually shifting, multiply situated identity seeking itself.

Many personal dimensions are entangled in shaping what the women cared about and what they sought, which shifted with circumstances. Their desires alerted them to particular pleasures to seek. Their needs drove them to seek some things and swerve away from others. Their values discriminated among their pleasures and others' needs, to propel their caring in particular directions. Their sense of purpose related to other people created aspirations for them that transcended, and inspired them to seek these aspirations. All of these drivers had the potential to create an energy which propelled them, pushed them into the resolve of "intention" whereby they committed their will to act or seek. Part of this energy was a particular engagement in the world, beginning with the attention that signaled a learning process.

But for this energy to coil itself into intention, and for the intention to spring into an action, something more was needed. Women often needed to feel a sense of personal power. Their will to know, or the will to act which generated the will to know how to act, often had to be animated by a conviction of their own agency to sustain the engagement of action learning. This sense of agency is the belief in possibility that transforms "I wish..." into "I will..." The women's sense of personal agency was often affected by their belief in the range of possibilities in the situation at hand, given the constraints that could not be changed and their stance towards these constraints. Their sense of possibility was often shaped imaginatively. Without agency, "I wish..." became a stopping place, a permanent deficit, a perpetual longing -- wanting but resigned to not having. Intention was different. "I will..." stated a resolve, a commitment to act or gain or choose or seek.

Thus intention in a learning context is about seeking, triggered by caring. Caring is often compelled by personal desires, values, people's sense of purpose and goals, and their needs. Intention is fueled by agency, the sense of personal power. Intention is catalysed by disjuncture. The unfolding self, and the self's shifting positionality, crystallizes intentionality as a project of establishing and expressing identity and its power as a meaning maker. This sense of self and the trajectories of intentions growing from self are, of course, crucially influenced by positionality. People position themselves to their environment as well as their intents according to their perceptions of the flows of power entwining them with their worlds.

Intention, disjuncture, and positionality are thus woven together with the shifting self in any learning experience or learning process. Each element affects the other in a reciprocal sharing that determines what people will learn, how they learn it, when they learn and when they become aware of their learning in the workplace.

Chapter 8

The Self in Work: Nurturing and Expressing an Authentic Self in the Workplace

> Women today, trying to compose lives that will honor all their commitments and still express all their potentials with a certain unitary grace, do not have an easy task. It is important, however, to see that, in finding a personal path among the discontinuities and moral ambiguities they face, they are performing a creative synthesis with a value that goes beyond the merely personal. We feel lonely sometimes because each composition is unique, but gradually we are becoming aware of the balances and harmonies that must inform all such compositions. Individual improvisations can sometimes be shared as models of possibility for men and women in the future. (Bateson, 1990, p. 232)

Why a full chapter on the self? In this study it became evident that an important thread in women's life histories of workplace learning was their learning about self. Underpinning many of their most powerful recollections is a connective tissue that explained their choice-making and actions: a sense of journey to release, uncover, invent, identify and explain their struggles to know self. This finding concurs with the work of educator Dominice (1990) in life-histories:

> When [adults] talk about education they describe their central struggle to know better who they are and what they want to do with their lives . . . Most adults tell how they struggled to reconcile the expectations of their social environment with their own desire to lead a unique existence. The educational biographies are a testament to how adults have educated themselves by transforming the models, values, and knowledge of their upbringing. (p. 205)

In the life-histories documenting women's workplace learning in this study, it was clear that the primary movement in their own knowing that these women recognized and celebrated was the movement through the work-sphere of their lives, entangled as this is with other spheres of their everyday existence, towards deeper, more integrative, discriminating, and inclusive understanding of self. This development corresponded with their sense of greater agency in the choice-making that most affected their work lives and thus their workplace learning.

The first section in this chapter will explore the processes of coming-to-know self in and through work. The process is dialectical: as confidence in the self as a knower grows, it influences and is influenced by the gradual awareness and naming of the self as this is conjured through and expressed in work activity and the workplace community. The women's experiences are only referred to since they have been described in detail in earlier chapters. The second section explores the extensive literature on self as it relates to work and to learning. Finally, in the third section, I weave together the threads between the processes of learning -- intention, disjuncture, and positionality -- and the self.

Exploring the Self

A dominant theme that emerged in this study was the evident seeking of women to understand their ongoing, shifting constructions of self. The question, What does "self" have to do with learning and work? is answered by the evidence that those intentions which engage attention and cause learning are informed by the self as it is engaged in search and struggle: Who am I in this world? what is it I do, the purpose I fill? Work, or whatever the women identified as worthwhile activity justifying their investment of time and physical, emotional, creative, or reasoning energy, had the developmental potential for expressing this purpose and thus helping many of these women to discover and develop their selves. Three themes emerged in the women's exploration of self: coming to know and name the self, confronting external structures and breaking free, and returning to an authentic self.

Coming to know self through work and in workplace communities

The activity of work and the context of a workplace appears to develop the self in two main ways: coming-to-know self, and active construction of self. Both processes are interwoven. These women seemed to come to know about their work self in three ways. First, they watched the self perform in the various opportunities for activity presented by work -- what they did well, what fit and didn't fit for them, what their voice sounded like. Second, they came to know about self through the images of themselves reflected in their colleagues' gaze. Third, they came to know about self through their accumulated biography of work experience -- what they had accomplished, what patterns their actions had created, what past images of self were revealed through their actions and how they responded to these later.

As the women came to know dimensions of their work selves, they could choose either to accept these dimensions, or to change them. They could choose to accept peaceably, or with self-deprecating resignation. They could choose to change with urgent anxiety and desperate wishing or with calm strategies and optimistic intention.

Coming to know the power of self: interpersonal, creative, and rising to challenge

Many of the women came to know and appreciate the power of their selves by watching them perform, sometimes with success and inner resources that surprised them. Often the women watched themselves respond to the challenges of instrumental action, by watching themselves in relationships with others. Work challenges often gave them opportunities with high stakes and strong motivation to show themselves certain special gifts of self of which they may have been unaware. Coming to know their own power with people is one of these gifts. Wendy discovered, in her work counseling addictive clients, a self that she described as "a very compassionate person", with real ability to understand people. Carolyn's power in building others' self-esteem became apparent to her in her clients' increased confidence. She learnt about her powers as a listener and trust-builder when she realized the close-knit bonds of her group sessions were unusual and highly valued.

Marilyn learned that she wielded a certain personal charisma, a credibility with people that still often surprised her. People told her she was influential and powerful, but she had a hard time understanding this. She remembered the time she was intimidated but braced herself anyway to phone the director of communications to negotiate a spot for herself on the provincial budget roundtables, and she was floored by his reaction: Why would he let me come? Like Marilyn, Liz said she was often surprised by her own influence over people, and by the kinds of people and opportunities that seemed to be attracted to her, like magnetism.

Many women said they also learned about the power of their own creativity, often through its revelations in work that could surprise and delight them. Janis found her creativity through its concrete release in her work:

> I discovered that creating animation had the power to animate me. I had a new life and energy in me. This came from developing a greater visual and kinesthetic sensitivity to movement and from getting under the skin of various characters. I had to try on character roles and to act out characters and objects. This all took imagination, willingness to trust my instincts and my body knowledge, and a focus strong enough to outweigh incipient self-consciousness. -- Janis

Persephone agreed to chair the woman's religious organization. Once she agreed to the job she was a bit afraid -- who am I to do this? Then she thought about things she'd always wanted to have happen at monthly sessions -- a flow of talk, a point of focus, an authentic connection of everyday life to faith and to nature and to each other -- and here was her chance. "I thought, what about an evening all about the weavings in our lives as women? -- and we'll bring in different kinds of cloth and stories, and find scripture passages and prayer. It's never been tried before." The experience was rich, and as Persephone continued to experiment with worship and dialogue she was surprised by the possibilities her own creativity presented to her.

The women often came to know their power to accomplish things through experiencing this power being released in meeting a challenge. This is the "I can" learning that work offers. As these women came to feel their power, they became more confident and learned to trust their own voices. Liz often referred to the personal confidence she gained, that affected all parts of her life, through working in supervisory positions of increasing responsibility for her corporation. She watched herself move through pressure situations with multiple simultaneous demands and people under stress, taking responsibility, setting priorities, directing others' actions, and meeting her own action goals.

In Zoe's new job as coordinator of continuing education she learned that she was good at handling crises -- she was effective using systematic problem-solving strategies to handle both budgetary and interpersonal crises. She also realized she had a special calm strength that others valued. Watching her own performance taught her to re-name her self: "I used to be very terribly shy. But I've got beyond that. I realized I could function, and function well, as a manager."

Sarah represented herself as someone who typically just responded to others' directions, without challenging the authority of these directions. The supervising nun refused to allow Sarah to hold an informal workshop for staff to share some new tools and information that she'd learned at a seminar. Despite the religious authority which typically choked her initiative, Sarah felt strongly enough about the value of the material that she went ahead anyway. The workshop was a success, Sarah was praised, and from that point on she said she has taken initiative to do autonomously those projects that *she* decided was important. "I trust my own judgment now," she said.

Learning to trust the inner power of "I can..."

When prompted to tell stories of a "peak learning" experience, these women typically narrated an experience of discovering their own personal power, watching themselves perform successfully in surprising ways. This is significant, partly because of the weight traditionally placed on learning through life-crisis events in adult education literature, and the general mythology that people learn mostly through reflecting on their errors. Of course, errors, crises, and dilemmas are significant parts of the overall process of experiential learning. But these women evidently thought of learning as a confirmatory experience, the closure of the learning cycle when the learner realizes what growth has been gained, marked by feelings of excitement, exhilaration and pride.

Elizabeth told of a "fight with the guy in the office next door" about what learning and training were all about, resulting in her developing a list of "Training Principles" which were "well-received" and finally adopted by the department. "They just loved it! It was a major learning for me." Why? "Because I realized *I can* turn a problem situation into a solution."

Janis, like others, began to believe in the power of her own self when once she risked trying something her own way and was surprised by its success. On her film project she tried a structured, down-to-business way to focus and organize the work. It worked! and they all thanked her. Her way was apparently better than the more scattered "fly-by-night" approach that she'd thought was the status quo in the film community. With the weight of external approval behind her, she began to realize she could run her own studio her own way.

A source of information about one's self that was trusted and valued by many of these women were the comments of colleagues in the workplace. "People tell me. . ." is a common way to introduce information about self. Kirsten learned she has a diplomatic and straightforward approach that is valuable in an organization, through various incidents ending in someone else observing this ability. On one occasion, Kirsten took a big risk and told her supervisor how he tended to interrupt and rush his employees -- but he praised her for her ability to deliver constructive feedback sensitively. When Marilyn ran for election in the conservative party she discovered she had the wrong picture of herself. "After the campaign I had to sit back and say, "Wow". All those people worked for me, they supported me. All those people cared about me. There must be something here I haven't seen yet. I had to take a look at myself and say, what were they supporting? What was there? What did they see that I haven't seen yet, that I didn't believe?"

In each of these stories, the activity of work presented a challenge which required action from the women which was unfamiliar. The action evoked or perhaps created powers within them that may have surprised them. The confirmation that the exercise of this power is good, however, is still conferred from without. It seems that some women came to the new belief that "I can..." when the knowledge community validated their power by explicitly granting its approval for their actions. One particularly interesting aspect in Elizabeth's story was that the confirmation that exulted her was conferred by a workplace community whose opinion she apparently held in little regard.

By contrast, Wendy's tales of feeling empty after performing work as a freelance contractor are revealing. She prepared and facilitated a workshop on career seeking for people feeling depressed and lonely. She "knew" from the immediate responses of the participants and from their later actions that the workshop had accomplished some important purposes in building self-esteem. But, "As a contractor, you just come in and do your stuff, then leave, and no one said anything." Without the feedback of colleagues or supervisor, she felt adrift, like she was never quite good enough. One of her tales related a new challenge she was given by a client organization: she was supposed to figure out the meanings which particular employees were making of their changed employment situation, and make some recommendations for appropriate educational interventions. Wendy, by herself, gradually developed a strategy to understand the task and plan the research. She described her own work with some hesitant pride, and was able to point to indicators of its success -- but again she didn't receive overt recognition and acknowledgment and approval of the workplace community. She was simply "the contractor", and her work was tacitly accepted as meeting the expectations of the contract. In her story telling, Wendy certainly didn't complain about the paucity of "praise" -- she didn't expect any -- but neither did she radiate satisfaction or awareness of the personal power she had discovered in working through the challenges of this research project.

Learning to trust the intuitive "voice"

As many women became more reliant on their power of self, they learned to trust the voice of their intuition in their instrumental action. Liz was confident now in saying, "I sometimes can't describe what it is I want, but I know it when I see it." When a consulting firm she'd hired to develop a training program spent two months circling the objectives without producing what she was looking for, she finally fired them. Carla found she not only got frustrated but didn't get as effective results running the bank by doing "what everybody else wants." She had learned to trust her own instincts and "just do what I wanted in the first place -- even if it means making unpopular decisions", because she had more success and everybody was happier.

Intuition seems especially crucial in work that depends upon ability to connect with people. Many women seemed to learn that their intuition could sense beyond language's limits exactly what people meant, and what they needed -- and they learned to acknowledge and respond to the information their intuition presented to their consciousness. Marilyn learned through her work facilitating focus groups that she can feel the presence of the other, she can pick up those unspoken things that alert her to what's being thought and felt. Carolyn learned to trust her intuitive "reading" of her clients as being generally reliable: she has startled people by "just knowing" when they have a question, or when they're experiencing psychological pain.

In her years of nursing, Fran learned that she "shone" at the bedside because she was so intuitive. "The whole time that you're bathing a patient or rubbing their back you're getting a feel for how they are, for their condition. And you're not going to find that by looking at a machine." Even now, many years after her full-time nursing career had ended, Fran felt the nudge of nursing intuition. When she was visiting her parents in the hospital, she noticed a girl in the next bed who had just had an appendectomy: "She tossed and squirmed. The nurse came in and gave her a shot, then left, but the girl just continued to toss about, so uncomfortable. I watched her for awhile, then I went over and fixed her pillows. And she settled down and went to sleep. I remember thinking, now how did I know that? It was a feel."

Intuition often reveals information about people. Janis had to learn "not to overrule my instincts with rationalizations." People could be very flattering and logical, but if the intuition said no, this is not a healthy project, she had to learn to walk away from it. In the film industry, explained Janis, the industrial hazard is the inevitable shortage of resources: money, people, time, to complete ambitious creative projects that are life-draining. Janis suffered one particularly horrible experience -- the film from hell -- working with a woman was a "panic junkie", spending long hours endlessly editing and re-editing material as the woman changed her mind. But Janis also worked on pressure projects that she remembers as exciting and creatively fulfilling. So Janis learned to "read the warning signs" -- attending to and interpreting those intuitive nudges that made judgments for her about which projects to get involved with, and which to resist. These nudges seemed to be largely based on cues that she observed in people -- although she found both the cues and the interpretive process of these cues difficult to articulate verbally.

Intuition isn't always right, and this was one source of ongoing learning. Marilyn followed hunches that led her to write proposals for contracts in a particular way that turned out to be wrong for particular clients. In one case she felt intuitively that the client wanted a public consultation process that was emergent in design and relied on feminist research methods, but she was wrong. Sometimes her instincts told her, "Be still and listen", while her rational logic told her, "Get going and act." Do I listen to my intuition or not? she wondered. Liz said she has to check out her intuitive "hunches" with follow-up evidence. "When I get that pulling-back feeling, I start asking more questions to find out what's really going on here."

Central to many of these stories is the women's attention to what they believed was their intuition as a legitimate source of knowledge. Their trust in this intuitive way of knowing often grew through work experience, especially experience with other people. This intuition was not received visually, like other sources of knowledge, but as a voice or as a sensation, a feeling. Thus it was not concrete; it had no substance or boundaries clarifying it as real according to their customary ways of perceiving and making sense of -- reading -- their worlds. Thus, although the women were readily able to name situations where they remembered experiencing this voice, they often found it difficult to verbalize the nature of the understanding that came to them intuitively. The situations in which they remembered being aware of their intuition were often ones involving decisions amidst uncertainty and ambiguity, where rational logic proved its limitations. To construe such situations satisfactorily, they had to attend to rich parameters and complex, multiple signals that seemed to stretch beyond the peripheries of rationality. This process of attending necessitated letting go of attempts to control and predict the situation with scientific logic, stopping the forward press of action, being still, and listening. This "stop and listen" stance allowed the intuitive thought process, unnamable yet familiar in sensation, to work.

Coming to name her self within the work-world

An important part of the women's development of self in their workplace practice appeared to revolve around the process of naming themselves. Part of this naming of self involved labeling one's work identity. "I am a bulldozer," said Catherine. "I'm a fighter", said Denise. "I'm a visionary," said Elana. "I'm the balancer," said Kirsten. "I'm a pragmatist," said Carla. Where did these labels come from? How did they become comfortable settling within the frames of particular labels? Why did they accept a label at all, an unappealingly static and flat representation which froze and mounted the self in a way that must have surely chafed?

One way of producing a sense of inner stability, of stamping the journey through a career as legitimate, may be to name not just what one does, but who one is in the day-to-day outer world of work. Labels helped the women focus and shape coherent wholes from the fragments of themselves spinning in a series of overlapping experiences and multiple interpretations of these experiences. Some women announced these labels proudly, defiantly, and expositorily. They would often lead and end a story narrating particular interactions they'd had in their work, with a self-label, almost like an explanatory headline.

Sometimes these labels had come from others and were accepted like a badge. This indicates what for some was the influence of other's perception of and response to the individual on the shaping of her own identity. People had told Catherine she was a bulldozer, and she began to view her own approaches to work through this interpretive lens. Sometimes the labels were acquired from somewhere and tried on and tried out in conversation -- if it fit it stuck. Carla took a personality test for managers that labeled her a "pragmatist", and she used the word frequently to describe her workplace behaviors.

Carla said she was a "pragmatist" and belonged to a small group of like-minded pragmatists who were valuable in their own right, but distinct from "persuaders" and "brainstormers" and "analysts." In an environment like a workplace where people learn that others form pictures of them using shorthand labels, perhaps they compromise the inner flux and complexity, and enter the art of self-labeling in an act of proactive identity-construction. The popularity of learning-style and personality "type" indicators may attest to the security provided by shorthand typologies simplifying human complexity. The process of the self coming into language through the finality of names and labels is not necessarily helpful in coming-to-know self. A label is not permeable, or conversant. It deprives a woman of agency and subjectivity. In thus naming her self a woman casts her fluid self into a concrete form, which both disciplines her behavior and guides her perceptions and interpretations of this behavior. When a woman comes to awareness of the oppression and destructive potential of this structure, she moves to a position of struggle.

Confronting the structures and shaking free

Catherine was despondent then furious when she saw that once again the principal had given her all the "leftovers" for next year's timetable, a melange of chemistry, mathematics, physics, and drama courses requiring hours and hours of preparation. Although she had started as a science teacher she had been growing and experimenting directing drama, and this year her production had won the drama festival. The principal's act after all her accomplishment and protestation signaled to her his image of her as malleable, manipulable, dispensable, and forever science -- certainly not the powerful, hard-working, creative specialist deserving recognition and a certain deference that she viewed her self emerging to be. She walked out after five years in this teaching job one sunny morning in May.

Marilyn talked about the terrible frustration of feeling "squashed" in a job where a superordinate wouldn't let her take initiative, tap her creativity, do things her way: "my whole self was totally submerged, clamped down. Even though there was lots of learning I couldn't use my power." Later when she looked back she storied this period of her life as striving to belong to a man's world, caught up in foreign values and purposes and processes of working that alienated her from her "authentic" self.

The women in this study were generally strong, confident, risk-takers by nature, as was evident in the previous chapters of this document. They tended to ask "why" frequently, to seek relentlessly for challenge and for ways to express their creative passion. Even those who were more compliant with normative regulations viewed themselves as too self-determined to be victimized in the workplace, or at least they did not subjugate themselves when others attempted domination. Thus when these women found their self butting against oppressive disciplinary work structures that threatened to constrict their development, they did not respond like colonized victims rising at last to resist their oppressors. Rather, they attempted first to make sense of what was happening, then to shelter a space for their self to live unharmed. When external structures threatened destruction or attenuation of the self, they fled.

These women, each in her own way, seemed to embrace a struggle to liberate and invent themselves through their vocation in fundamental ways that I believe are more complex than notions of the colonized becoming transformed and empowered. The remainder of this section explores some of these ways.

Coming-to-know the structures threatening to fix the self

A job shapes a work-self: people see themselves in particular ways according to the role they play in a workplace community, and others perceive and respond to them according to the work-self they see reflected in their working role. Many of the women may have been surprised to discover that others in a workplace community didn't see what they knew to be their potential, bounded as they were by the parameters of their job that limited their ability to express and display those aspects of self that they believed were significant to their overall identity. The women grow within a vocation, they begin to name themselves, and in bringing to language the structures that form boundaries defining their identity and thus bringing them to presence in the work world, they begin to become aware of their special difference.

But this identity only exists in the communicative realm of the workplace community, where it must be negotiated within the web of intersubjectivity. These women sometimes felt that others in the workplace challenged them: 'Who do you think you are?' Elana found that in an organization, people established a mental picture of her acting in a particular job and having particular personal characteristics and capabilities. Although she felt she was growing and learning and changing, others' perception of her didn't necessarily change. Just as when after seeing someone daily for ten years, others may examine a ten-year-old photo of that person and express surprise at the changes. People who see themselves as picture-makers of the world shape their pictures of the world and the people in it, then interpret new data to fit these pictures. This is a way of imposing coherence and stability on a changing world.

People saw Elana as an expert in classification and recruitment. That was her job, after all, for some years. But she saw herself as having moved way beyond that to envisioning people's development. She'd been reading books, attending courses, watching the projects around her. Yet her sense of self collided with the picture of her self that she felt was clouding others' gaze, the picture of her reflected in the way they treated her, the picture imposed upon her and fixing her in their gaze, the picture demanding she conform to a stable, unchanging, predictable identity. She had to do something dramatic to tear away this old picture of her from the bulletin board of the organizational memory. So she set up an employee development program herself and ran it -- even though "I'm not" a stand-up facilitator, even though she was nervous in the face of others' skepticism. But she proved herself and won the others' credibility. She often referred to her jobs as "boxes", the walls of which she pushed and pushed as she learned and grew, until they couldn't be stretched any further.

Denise came to verbal blows with her manager when she discovered that he thought of her as lazy and hard to live with. She'd worked overtime for months, her bottom-line value being giving "150%" to achieve top-quality in her work. She was enraged by the other's discrepant picture, and realized she was helpless to say anything to change it. An image, once formed, is a powerful shaper of thinking. Persephone's hardest stress at work was dealing with clients who were angry and cast her as the villain responsible for their hurt. "They don't know that I am sensitive and caring and all the good things that I know I am. Intellectually I can understand their pain and rationalize what they're doing, but it hurts when they believe I'm a bad person."

Confronting and struggling against perfectionist standards

Many of these women had for years imposed on themselves superhuman standards for quality of work and hours to devote to their work. Many realized their standards were "perfectionist": unrealistic and unhealthy. Some had taken steps like counseling to help them overcome what they'd learnt to label as "workaholism". Commonly, parents were mentioned as the source of this work ethic: "my dad instilled in us . . .", "my mother always said . . .", "that's part of growing up in an Irish family . . ."

The women often said they were afraid of not being good enough, even when they'd accumulated a work history demonstrating their ability to accomplish things very well. Three had experienced significant physical breakdowns directly related to the stress they'd brought upon themselves with overwork. Many spoke of their ongoing struggles to learn to priorize tasks and correlate appropriate standards to the importance of the task, to be satisfied with work that isn't "perfect" when it doesn't really matter. But what a struggle! Despite her awareness of the problem and her efforts to talk her way out of it, Wendy still found herself being driven in circles by her own "second-guessing" -- when preparing a program, she continually searched for and rejected material. Nothing was quite good enough, even after she received rave reviews -- it was never quite good enough.

Perfectionist goals trapped their sense of self in a continuous double-bind. Carla said, "I hate the word satisfactory." To seek labels of excellence, people set standards for their work that may be humanly impossible: standards that they can never achieve, that doom their actual effort to be "never quite good enough." So their self is always on the run, perpetually in deficit, urgently seeking improvement. Meanwhile, the frame they are using to measure self is performative action. Stillness, relational caring, exploratory learning, unbounded reflection -- these may not be part of many people's criteria for what counts as worthwhile in their work, at least not while they are in the grips of old beliefs that work is constituted by perfectionist goal-oriented action. Unemployment, or the "between-jobs-period", makes this belief palpable. Denise struggled after leaving her job to make sense of her self and her life -- "I was going crazy. I needed to accomplish something." Eventually she found a way to structure her time by creating resumes and setting up job interviews. "Now," she said, "when I get to the end of the day, I can list a lot of things I got done." Marilyn was in a different period of career life. After a series of contracts she was searching for meaningful work, and struggling to avoid the lure of the gerbil wheel of busy-ness. She explained that she was "feeling empty" right now, and finding it hard to avoid running out to do something, anything, to fill the vacuum. "I know I need to wait . . . it's like being pregnant. . . .I get to the end of the day and say, what I have I accomplished? What happened to my day? I'm still measuring things by that old standard of visible results."

Expectations for the self changed as the women became more competent in a particular work activity, and in managing their unfolding career changes. Liz allowed herself a learning window when she was given new tasks. She allowed herself to go slow, set boundaries, acknowledge what she could and could not do, take calculated risks, allow herself to fail, and accept feedback. But in the areas she believed she should have mastered by now, she set for her self high standards of expectation. Nancy told stories of anxiety from her nursing apprenticeship. She was angry and scared when confronted by unfamiliar situations demanding she learn practical skills-by-doing -- she wanted so badly to be competent. However, she still knew it was okay for a novice to be making mistakes as part of the learning stage, whereas now a nursing mistake would be traumatic for her because "I should know better". Yet she also took mistakes more in stride with experience, approaching unfamiliar situations with calm and logic, preparing for surprise and alert to act and adjust as she gradually made sense of things. Audrey now took all the time she needed to learn something new, and did it in her own way -- if that meant sitting up in bed late at night with a computer manual and a highlighting pen, then patiently working through what she's learned on the keyboard the next day, then that's what she did. She was no longer worried about keeping up to some normative criterion for effective learning processes.

Losing one's vocation

For some women, being moved within an organization against their will to a job with narrower scope triggered the struggle of their self to be recognized. Those who had experienced this did not speak of the move with sadness at losing status, or "being demoted", but more with anger at losing their vocation, their opportunity to seek and express with freedom and creative passion. This loss seemed to be the spark that alerted their recognition of the oppressive structures of their work and its power over their identity. Just as a job helped them create an identity by presenting activity challenges that elicited and shaped a particular performative work-self, so the loss of that job apparently created a vacuum of self.

Zoe found herself uncertain and grieving when she was placed back in a college classroom after her stint coordinating the extension faculty. All the new ways of responsible, multi-task behavior and big picture thinking, as part of a daily performativity that she'd learned to admire in her self, were suddenly gone. Her old teaching self had been put away, making room for the administrator self, and now she felt the organization expected her to revert to her teacher shape.

Denise was taken out of the training unit where she'd blossomed creatively and placed back in her first job with the company, administrative paper-work with less responsibility and little people-contact. She said, "I felt caved-in, dehydrated. I couldn't get out of bed. I didn't want to go to work. I became obsessed hating my job. I need to keep learning."

Elizabeth told of being "parachuted" from a rich, autonomous management position involving her in many varied messy projects up in the rather wild frontier of the Grande Prairie region, back to a rigidly classified "desk" in a poisonously cramped bureaucracy. Feeling her wings clipped, she watched herself sink into bitterness. She now struggled against a shadowy suspicion that her voice didn't count, her wishes didn't matter, her destiny was controlled by the organization, and her identity was rooted to this desk doing these meaningless tasks.

Denise, Elizabeth and Zoe seemed to be feeling a crisis of identity, which triggered their will to struggle, to assert their power of self. The work-self through which they'd become accustomed to understanding their daily activity and their position relative to others in the community was suddenly changed. Unlike Marilyn's experience, where this change albeit stressful still represented a sense of moving forward on "the journey", for Zoe and Denise the change signified for them regression, a movement backward. Their personal response was often despondency, and closing themselves off to learning opportunities.

The will to power: The struggle to continue becoming

For many women in this study, the awareness and acceptance of their struggle to know self as one central preoccupation of their reflectivity on work often emerged when they recognized the oppressive potential of the structures and forms they had striven to fit. But the willingness to attend to this insight seemed to come only after a span of years spent working in one or more jobs in one or more organizations. The hurly-burly idealism of early years in the workplace seemed more consumed with "learning the ropes", establishing to themselves and others a trustworthy level of "competence", and winning approval from the external workplace community of disciplinary norms of practice and power relations of discourse. Their willingness to struggle against these structures often grew as they began to appreciate the value of their unique selves, learned to discern their differences from their surrounding structures, and gained the courage and confidence to assert their will.

There is an implicit assumption by many of these women, evident in many of their stories about self-knowing, that the self is an inner core, sometimes folded away from the view of conscious awareness, but nonetheless unitary and coherent. Their task was to unfurl the "real" or "authentic" self -- learn to discern it, and help strengthen it. Many of these women gave priority in their thinking time to this struggle to seek identity, to make sense of the relation and discrepancy between self-in-work and the multiple other selves which sometimes overlapped and sometimes collided with the working self, to puzzle through the contradictions and embrace the powers of self as these were presented to consciousness. Their stories illustrated above all the continuing search to understand and express self. In and through this search was uncovered the power and will of self, expressed in the intentionality which propelled learning.

Sometimes a formal learning experience triggered a conscious awareness of and interest in deeper self-knowing. Liz attended a five-day seminar on developing personal excellence which was life-changing. The funny thing was, she was feeling wonderfully fulfilled with her worklife and homelife and didn't see any need for such a course -- but it helped her synthesize and label tacit understandings about her self, an act of languaging that made her feel powerful. The course also helped her set personal directions that were validated by the course's posture as approving expert. Carla related a similar experience -- a short, intensive course exploring her self-in-work. But, said Carla, "You have to be at the right stage of readiness for a personal development course like that. You have to be over the struggle of, How do I run this branch? and ready to think about, How can I change and grow?"

Janis used to aspire to fit the hungry demands of the film-making community: push harder, work longer, ask for less. Now after two serious physical illnesses and a psychologically debilitating experience on a documentary working with an "panic junkie" (during which Janis had dreams of being imprisoned in a concentration camp), she refused to subject herself to such structures. Coming to know and listen to herself was now an important focus for Janis in her work life. She valued learning to "concretize my inner resources, make my strengths concrete, bring my barriers into a character." She spent time doing what she calls "inner work": living a reflective and conscious life, attempting to discern and understand the images her conscious presents to her and aligning her activity to be congruent. Her life as an animator and manager of a busy studio had recently been "caught up in an external world of structures, products, and bottom lines," and she found herself dreaming of a wasteland. She said she needed time to get grounded again, become an artist again, feed the cow instead of continually milking it, and get back to something "more feminine."

Asserting the power to rename the structures marking self and work

> I'm a workaholic -- disciplined, driven. I will take a challenge and it will become my entire focus to the exclusion of everything else healthy in my life.

> I was given two jobs in [a rural Alberta community]:managing the facility, and being the recreation director. I would never allow anybody to do that to me again, but at the time I worked very hard, to prove to myself and others that I could do it. Finally I said, stop. Stop. I took a two-month leave of absence to look at what I was doing. When I came back I had decided some new principles for my life -- balance, working no more than 50 hours a week, pursuing some education. Then comes the call from Ottawa -- an exciting opportunity. It was chaotic and out of control. And I could be the one to go in and fix it. -- Marilyn

Marilyn, like many of the women in this study, valued what she called "balance", but found it difficult to make the choices that she instinctively sensed were healthiest for her. Continually she found herself in work situations that evoked her own outrageous standards of perfectionism, her competitive energy to prove herself, and her own systems of overdrive that buggy-whip her self to exhaustion. Her story showed how she was tantalized by challenge -- to prove "I can..." -- even when she was able to distance herself from the scrabble long enough to realize the personal toll being exerted by her inability to put firm boundaries around her work. She was later to describe the self that emerged in Ottawa as tired, overworked, someone she didn't like. Even now, as she was tempted by opportunities that offered overwork and stress along with excitement and challenge, she found it hard to stave off the yearning to leave this empty space of waiting, and jump into the fray one more time.

Janis found through experience that she needed to "draw very distinct lines. To say, no, I can't do this job which you say will be a few weeks but I know will be four months' of editing that you're not willing to pay for." A critical learning experience for Janis was a documentary that was "hell": as a decisive person who likes to find focus quickly then use it to structure the raw footage, Janis was working as editor with a director who kept changing her mind, wanting to go back and revisit, redo. In a context where time and money were running out, and the work-style conflict was raising anxiety and anger, emotions that blocked her creativity: the result was pain.

Setting boundaries for some women meant saying no to something which didn't fit well with their understandings of what was healthy for them, what was a good fit for whatever they sensed was their work self, what would help them avoid pain. Janis said, "I got better and better at walking away, saying, 'I am not the best person for the parameters of this project, or realizing early in the project, this isn't working -- it's going to lead to grief.'" Liz turned down what would have been great opportunities because she knew she didn't have the time she needed to be effective: "I will not set myself up for failure. I set myself up for success. So I need to feel comfortable that I can do it." The contradiction is that many of these women also showed that they would deliberately take on things that were uncomfortable. They purposefully sought disjuncture for the stimulation of launching into complete uncertainty. They also learned through experience that often when they tried things they didn't think they could do, they discovered inner potential for power of action that they weren't aware of, and were often surprised by their own success. This is one of the paradoxes of boundary setting. Boundaries protect the self, but are not always permeable enough to avoid restricting the opportunities that are the very life-giving challenges sought by these women.

Work experience often taught the women to label what they could do well and what they thought they couldn't do. They may have set boundaries to prevent the pain of having to perform in situations they thought they couldn't handle. Kirsten decided after her sales experience that "I didn't have the head for making deals, knowing the profit margins and being able to negotiate. I'm just not fast enough for those things." She also found herself running to get authority for the impromptu decisions required when negotiating with customers, rather than trusting her own decisions. But she compared her self-in-work to others' sales approaches. Her summary of her experience of self in sales: "I'm just not cut out for the wheel and deal." Elizabeth enumerated a list of things she felt she "can't do", a list constructed through work experience where she believed she performed less effectively than others: "I don't feel comfortable doing workshops, I'm not very good at it; I'm slow at putting things together on the computer -- I can learn and I'm not afraid of it, but where it takes me two days someone else can take the idea and put it together on the computer very creatively, and fast."

Wendy struggled with deciding "How much time is too much time?" to spend on a project, as an independent consultant. "When is it done well enough? How much of my effort and expertise makes a billable hour?" Catherine struggled to defend her charges to clients who communicated a lower understanding of her dollar worth than she would accept. When she started out, she "gave away" her services to forge a network. Now, after building a reputable practice, she attempted to charge "the going rate", that of the male consultants in her field, but found she had to continually defend this rate. She was frustrated but she had a strong enough sense of self to refuse to bend to the potentially debilitating message of the market. Janis also found her field quick to press an advantage with anyone willing to undervalue a service and do more for less. While she was "drawing the boundaries tighter" and giving away less of her expertise, she agreed now and then to do whatever was needed for her friends. It was still a grind, but a different ethic had replaced the exchange ethic of labor and production. Audrey found that boundaries of time shifted during her days working at home depending upon how she labeled her activity: with her work, she was conscious of how much time a task was taking, and she felt some urgency and sense of trying to measure up to whatever standards might be imposed by imaginary others. But when her neighbor's children came over, issues of time disappeared. The task was family sustenance work: domestic labor and child-care, but Audrey didn't think of it as "work". She valued the reciprocal helping relationship that she had established with her neighbor, and the time flowed into a mutual sharing of activity and caring.

The boundaries come from having to make decisions about what constitutes a worthwhile focus for gifts of time and energy. These women often struggled to meet and yet resist their own high expectations to perform with excellence. The struggle for many of them appeared to be a continuing dynamic to protect and defend the self, learning the margins that define the self, that separate it from the community and others in relationships, learning to say no, learning to firmly name what lies outside the purview and reach of the self, while learning to bring to language and appreciate the seemingly contradictory elements coiled in complex tangles inside the self. The other part of the struggle was the impulse to construct a self through work, setting high standards and persevering to meet them, positioning the self in the community by attending carefully to the image of self in other's minds, while also naming the self in ways designed to compel and create anew. The continuing contemplation of self attempted to find continuity between the acting and the reflecting self, both to make choices structuring the forms of work within which self can blossom, and to make sense of the self released in past structures.

Returning to an authentic self

Many of the women described their current state of work-self as being in transition. As stories of earlier times unfolded, it became clear that for most, their working lives had been characterized by transition. Most could not identify with a sudden transformation, a radical change in self "triggered" by a life- or work- crisis, or by environmental or social change. Transformation theory ascribed to by theorists such as Mezirow, Freire and Daloz represents adult development as a rupture of certain meaning structures -- worldviews or core beliefs -- that produces a significant shift in understanding. Such shifts are often occasioned, claim theorists like Hart (1990), by exposure to social change such as consciousness-raising events.

Many of the women were very clear in explaining that their changes in self and in what they valued currently as knowledge was incremental, continual, yet very gradual. Janis said that the notion of great transition was a over-simplification: "I find it much more useful to look at a series of smaller continuous transitions over the course of a life. Adulthood is a rhythmic flow of expansion and contraction. In-breath and out-breath." Marilyn described the process as one of continually "unwrapping" her self in its vocation, peeling off layers. These metaphors of discovery, shedding, and breathing contradict the dominant metaphors of construction that accompany much theory about self-development and knowledge production, and raise serious questions about the relevance of transformation theory in workplace learning.

Instead the self seems often to be viewed as continually becoming, being in constant flux, carrying simultaneously with the image of self in the present moment an image or vision of future-self and personal aspirations, along with discarded but memoried images of one's past-selves. Elana, for example, shuddered to remember how she could become complacent and lifeless and "lazy" when the job lacks creative challenge -- "that's not me," or at least, not a self that she wanted to wake up to every day.

Be-coming self: Accepting continual transition

Many of the women described themselves to be in a current period of career transition, taking stock and sorting through alternatives. The transition for some was sparked by a sense of discontent, a decision to act upon a growing feeling or a choice to feel defiant and take action after some final straw. For others the transition began as a gradual uncoupling from the work that had previously engaged them. Many were reflecting on their own history and needs to wonder what it was they felt to be missing in their lives, what is was that were seeking: more formal education? a different type of work? different people to work with? Many emotions seem to co-exist, many inner voices clammer for attention, in these times of transition. Voices of calm told them to trust the process, relax and see what happens, be still and wait. Voices of impatience said 'get it over with, it's time to move on, this is not good for you, you don't have to take this.' Voices of discipline sometimes nagged 'you're making something out of nothing.'

Sarah wanted to work with poor women, helping them to link together for friendship and support and self-reliance -- "but that sort of work doesn't pay much." Persephone, Catherine and Elizabeth were sorting through the decision to complete more graduate work at the university: Where will it take me? Is that where I want to go? Will I find the kinds of relationships I'm seeking? Will the learning experience meet my needs for challenge and excitement? Elana wondered if she was leaving the organization too soon if she left now. Would she miss out on some learning opportunities if she left? Carla wondered if she should seek a higher position in the bank's hierarchy. Would her need for more challenge, for something new, be met at a regrettable sacrifice of other things she held important? Audrey knew her business was not growing as fast as it could have if she pushed harder, but she was trying to avoid comparing herself to what she perceived to be the consulting norms of selling herself. Catherine was tired of compromising her standards for excellent work to meet her clients' parameters and corresponding lack of willingness to pay.

Janis's sense of self was wrapped in the creativity of her work. "Animation," she said, "helps me to tap into the inner force. It helps to animate me." She strived to connect close to her dreams, not for a source of ideas, but as a reflection of her inner world which she sought to match with her outer world of activity, through her work. Her animation studio was called "salamander", an image that came to her in a dream. She explained that a salamander is an ancient symbol of alchemy: clear, with fire for its heart. People come together to participate in the magic that creates a work of art. Her studio had just finished an animated feature that won awards -- "We've been going flat out."

"But right now," Janis said, "I'm in a transition. I'm at a crossroads. Maybe it's because I just turned forty. I need to get grounded again." She's feeling an "inner need" to move away from the deadlines, pressure, and money of the "external" world, the workplace world. So she was leaving the film-making studio that she'd worked so hard to build. She wondered whether she would feel lost without the structure of workplace activity. She expected sacrifices but didn't know exactly what she would have to give up to move into this new space. She was expectant, uncertain, hopeful. Others told her, 'you're crazy'. All she had to follow was her intuitive voice.

For many of the women, this experience of transition was apparently not unfamiliar, not a distinct phase women happen to encounter only in mid-life. Transition, continuous choices and changes, marks the flow of their selves moving in and through work throughout their careers. A fuller examination of the substantive nature of women's choice-making throughout their work-lives extends beyond the limits of this study, but appears to be an important area for further study.

Letting go the structures of work activity

This gradual realization of the need to "let go", to move out from under the structures of work activity, the comforting forms that could reassure them that their presence in lived time had meaning, was frightening for some of the women. Marilyn experienced periodic "black times" and loneliness. She "dropped out" of the organized workplace some time ago when she left her the political pressures of life as executive assistant for the leader of the opposition in Ottawa. After losing her own election in Alberta she'd come to Edmonton to "heal" and figure out, "Who is Marilyn?" When I first met her she was luxuriating in the euphoria of exploring simplicity: taking courses, trying different kinds of contracts in community building that came her way here and there. But now she was growing increasingly restless. Inside "chattering voices" kept at her: 'Get on with it! Who are you anyway and where are you going?' She met other more aggressive, apparently successful consultants and worried: should she be marketing herself, pushing harder? Other more peaceful voices told her to be calm, trust the process of allowing her self to gradually find its own way: "Be still and listen." She felt there was a meaningful purpose for her life, a purpose that would be revealed to her and realized through her work. But it had been over a year now, and the chatter was growing stronger. On bleaker days she felt she wanted to rush out and fill the emptiness by working at some job, any job. It was getting harder to be still, and she wondered which of the voices she should listen to.

Elana was struggling with voices too. This was a career transition time when she was deciding what to do next -- and the process was focused on trying to hear and see the self that was becoming. One voice said, "Get on with your life, get out of the government. Get real." But what was real? She said, "I don't have a vision yet of where I want to be." She was asking herself, "Do I value where I am now?" Was this working self a me that I like? Another voice told her, "If you hang on a little bit longer you'll accomplish something quite wonderful." She knew what she valued -- but she wondered if this self-in-work in this particular workplace was becoming something she valued. Elana thought in terms of place and concrete pictures, but in her work with people in a large bureaucracy it was difficult to realize a sense of concrete accomplishment.

Who were these voices? For Elana and Marilyn, both presenting themselves outwardly as highly self-possessed, confident women, the inner turmoil appeared to originate with the self acknowledging its power of will, of self-determination, of choice. Both women were convinced of the significance of this vocational choice in the totality of their lives and being, granting to their work the power of shaping their identity. Yet their internalization of a postmodern melange of conflicting ideologies and discourses seemed to leave them both struggling to know where to listen.

Liz seemed more certain in her direction, more confident naming the process and the importance of her coming-to-know self by moving inward in her vocation. She was not contemplating any external changes, up or away, to accommodate the inner stirrings: she would stay with this company that had "looked after" her for so many years, because the job grew with her and allowed her to change. She was focusing much more on understanding her self through her work, her needs, her connections with others. She said, "I take more blank time. Think time. Not being always so busy at work. Where have I come from? How did I get here?" Self-discovery helped her figure out her "stopping places" she was stuck in and the walls she built at work, finding her real priorities, confronting the beliefs reflected in her actions, and meeting the risks. When she examined her work experiences, she discovered what she could do, which gave her the confidence to enter new learning.

Audrey said she had finally learned to let go the control she always sought in her work, and that she was coming to peace now in her own business at home. Like Marilyn, she had her days of frustration and doubt when the chatter began. She wondered if she were working fast enough or hard enough, if she should be marketing herself more: "I'm thinking, I'm not making much money here -- is this what I should be doing?" But on the good days she believed that an authentic self was blossoming here -- wiser, more settled. "When it's right for me, I feel I'm making an important contribution," said Audrey of her work with women through journal writing. "I'm not locked in anymore. When I first left my job I felt I had to rush out and get a teaching job right away. But now I've relaxed. I don't need as much salary to live, somehow."

Many of these women sensed their selves stirring, readying for something new. As they cast about for action options that could give space and performative shape to these selves, they examined different career options. Many didn't mention their deliberation of changes in other parts of their lifeworld: family, location, leisure, community work, or faith journey. Many were pursuing new learning opportunities, but these were related directly to their sense of vocation. This likely is a function of the context of the research conversations with these women, which configured their life histories with "work" at the fulcrum.

Practical issues and changes in their conjugal lives were entwined with transition: a woman can't easily allow herself to enter a time of "becoming" without freedom from child-rearing and the urgent need to provide a daily paycheck. Denise like some other women in this study was beginning a marriage -- which for her was signalling a new phase of life, a changing identity, that was shaping her re-thinking of her vocation -- now that she had quit the job that caused so much grief. Janis said, "I'm fortunate to be marrying a man who can support me while I take a sabbatical and do art for a time" -- and she had no children. Audrey's daughter was grown up now, and Audrey had recently married a financially stable retiree. Elana's husband had just retired, which affected her sense of entering a new phase of life -- and they had no children at home. Marilyn had saved a nest-egg which would hold out for a time while she explored -- and her children were grown. These women did not appear to view their situation as a loss of independence or self-reliance, but almost as liberation from servitude. Their sense of enslavement, where this existed, was not necessarily imposed by a job, but by their own former "idea" of themselves in a job.

Many referred to their good fortune. But these seemed to have accepted what they described as a much simpler way of life, which required for its sustenance fewer structures of activity and fewer commodities than their first ventures in the workplace taught them to believe. Many talked about rediscovering simplicity, realigning "priorities" to value peace more than prosperity, and "letting go" of old moral corsets. In the particularities of their own choices for everyday living, many of these women appeared to have rejected what Borgmann (1992) referred to as modernism's "commodious individualism", the ravages of which, claims Borgmann, threaten to abandon middle class people in corners of extreme privacy and spiritual hunger.

Finding a core of stability for/in self in a destabilized world

As the women talked about uncertainty and even painful unpredictable surprises in their workplaces and their roles there, it became apparent that their ability to adjust flexibly to these changes, and their source of strength to support their own initiatives to change their circumstances, was related to the degree to which they felt anchored, felt some compass point to stabilize the roving feet of their selves in a shifting world. "I need challenge and I need to change," said Nancy, "But I also want a certain amount of routine. And I need a core of stability." This core was often found within the autonomous self. Many women, especially those who remained buoyant and enthusiastic and positively expectant rather than feeling bitter and hard-done-by after years of struggle to adapt to tumultuous change in their worklives, had deliberately woven a sense of a coherent, unitary self. The various happenings, the bizarre, the unfair, the surprising, the unexplainable, were patchwork pieces sewn into a pattern that derived meaning as it was improvised. This meaningful pattern of self anchored today's potentially alienating and fragmentary existence in a project that had purpose and momentum. When this project was connected to certain life intentions or seekings of a woman, she often seemed to feel the serene security of personal commitment to something larger than the confusion of fractured everyday moments, larger even than the solid and coherent quilt of self.

This survival imperative appears to motivate a search for an inner self that drives many people away from the community and into the privacy of their living rooms to curl up within reassuring self-development best-sellers. Several women in this study said they found an "anchor" for their self in such books. The proliferation of such books on the market today, and the mass indulgence in them by North American adults working in many situations and disciplines, is perhaps a testament to a mass search for meaning in an overly commodified, alienating, urgent world that has become focused upon self as the only reliable and continuous element among today's shifts and turbulences. "I find my solace and my direction from some of the books I read. That keeps me on what has to be my road. I don't care about the organization's road," said Elana. At the time of that interview, she mentioned books like Covey's *Seven Habits of Effective People*, Bridges' *Transitions* and Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* as books that "nurture my soul". Carla read a bit of Stephen Covey every morning -- "it's like a compass," she said. Elizabeth and Audrey both referred to psychology books that helped them remember that it was okay to be who they were, to think positive, to "let go" and be at peace. Liz also read, and valued highly the "personal excellence" seminars she attended which allowed her space to name her personal needs, interpret her experiences, and develop the inner strength that allows one to accept other people rather than feel threatened by them. Healing is a dominant metaphor, both in self development literature and in these women's stories. They talked of needing "solace" as well as direction, learning to affirm rather than harshly judge themselves. These humanistic books perhaps provide voices which create a new community for a woman reading alone in her living room after an exhausting and conflictive workday, a community which acknowledges and sympathizes with her hurts, and asserts her essential goodness and internal power. This need to feel affirmed and connected is echoed in other studies about women as relational learners (MacKeracher, 1994).

Sometimes the workplace community itself offers a temporary mooring of stability. Women who remembered the excitement of participating in informal teams, where people were connected by the energy of a creative project; or the warmth of camaraderie in a work group marked by mutual respect, also talked about feeling a sense of stability. Their self was validated by the group as worthwhile, as required to shape the pattern of the whole, as anchored in something more solid and meaningful than fluctuating moment-to-moment reality. The anchor was purpose. A workplace project often provides a clear sense of purpose. Immersion in such projects, especially when surrounded by others who affirm for the present their participation in these projects as worthwhile and meaningful, tied their labor to an anchor that often gave these women stability.

But often such stability began to grate. These women told stories of initially feeling enthusiastic and purposeful in a project, then eventually feeling restless and leaving to seek something else. What eroded the anchor of purpose? Wendy missed the warm companionship with her colleagues at the addiction counseling centre, an informal team who could be counted on to give her stability and reaffirm her sense of purpose in the job. They listened to and cared about and laughed with one another. But the counseling work never changed; she grew so tired of it and so disillusioned with the efficacy of her own efforts that she felt she had to get out. Perhaps the dullness of routine, the repetition of the same sort of activity every day, the growing sense of not moving forward, but continually circling around what had become "old" knowledge, was what wore out the spark of excitement. If the anchor proves to be permanently soldered to the ocean floor, the death-in-life on a still ship might be ultimately more threatening than the possibility of thrashing about alone in a sea of meaninglessness.

Recognizing and interpreting layers of self

As the women alternately sought stability or excitement, the memories of self they were left with as it was expressed in their past work activity and roles was sometimes troubling. Elana looked back now with some disgust at the complacent self she saw sitting at her secretary's desk many years ago: competent but bored with life and work, fearful of choosing the uncertainty of seeking other destinies. Her memory told her she was jarred into the decision to start university by becoming aware at that time of the incongruence between this picture of complacent self, with her desired sense of self. Thus she must have been able to distance her reflecting conscious self from a picture of her self acting and thinking in the job, then as well as now.

Even now, as she reasoned her way through the current career transition she felt she was experiencing, she often separated her conscious self in the current moment from the acting self of recent memory to interpret and assess. She was comparing the picture to her own standards for her self, and to a picture of a future vision of her self: the strong self-reliant lady of 70 who was free from fear and continually exploring new things. She said as she reflected on her self-in-work in the recent periods of organizational chaos, "Oh I can be lazy. I can be very lazy." Her definition of "lazy" was implied by its opposite in her descriptions of her own periods of productivity: continually seeking new understandings, stretching her boundaries of concern, visioning new projects, challenging the people around her, risking and learning by experimenting with the unfamiliar. Lazy was Elana's judgment of a self that simply performs well-defined tasks competently.

Fran said in frustration at one point, "I really don't know why we go over this stuff. That's not me. I'm not a nurse anymore." I was surprised. She had just been narrating stories of vivid detail from her nursing days thirty years ago. But what she really wanted to tell were this year's stories of her classes at the university, the workshops she was nervously preparing for other nurses, her life at home in the country and her learning from her grown children. I wondered, do we put away a past self-in-work, like a winter coat that's showing its wear and doesn't fit as well anymore? Zoe said, "I'm an administrator. Not a lawyer." And she didn't just mean, I don't do lawyer work every day any more. Her stories showed that she identified a group of people who thought and acted in a particular way, called lawyers, and although she was legally bound to membership of that group, she didn't accept the lawyering self as being her -- not any more.

Accepting mystery and interconnectedness: Spirituality in workplace practice

Half of the women talked explicitly about the significance of their spirituality, particularly in their process in work of coming-to-know, and of becoming. Others made references implicitly to their work in what I regard to be spiritual terms: seeking something bigger, deeper than the self in one's work, sensing an interconnective and inexpressible energy flowing through them and others, accepting the existence of unexplainable occurrences which make sense in a realm of mystery. Mack (1992), in writing about spirituality and the self, states "paradoxically the way to get a little closer to knowing is to acknowledge our not knowing and the depths of mystery it embodies" (p. 17). The paradox of this theme of spirituality emerging as it did in this particular study, is that the workplace is precisely about reducing mystery to increase control, focusing on the tangible and measurable and snuffing out the unreliable, non-quantifiable, and non-visible. Yet these women not only naturally integrated their spiritual selves with their work-self, they also pursued their spiritual searches for meaning in their work activity in modern workplaces.

Liz said that spirituality was certainly not something she would talk about openly at the workplace, because such discussion "makes some people uncomfortable", such as her boss. But she believed her most important learnings in her work -- how to listen deeply, how to understand and reach out to care for others -- came from the development of her "spiritual side". Her beliefs about connectedness, destiny, and the flow of energy through people gave her, Liz explained, an inner light. She said somewhat cautiously that people at work seemed attracted to her "sparkle", her joy. People experienced an acceptance with her, which helped her weave rich relationships. So Liz felt accomplishment and connection in her work, which directly influenced her strength of self.

Carolyn's work was founded on her spiritual beliefs of letting go of the past, melting the defensive walls protecting self from others, trusting others, and becoming vulnerable to their spirits. Most of all, she believed in interconnectedness, which was the driving force in her work building relationships and community with people in her workshops. Like Liz, Carolyn strived to learn better how to really make space to listen to another. Her reflections were occupied with questions of how better to invite others into knowledge of their own worth and strength, and how to connect people with one another.

Catherine referred to the limits of words to express the mystery of power she found her work projects could generate among groups of people ("My editor tells me to just call it 'synergy' because no one will understand what I want to talk about.") She too was passionate when she explained her belief in the interconnectedness of humans, the web of energy which she first learned and taught to high-schoolers as an archetype of biology, and now understands as an infinite and global flow of bonds between people's voices, intentions, actions and their consequences. Her work of seminars and organization development was devoted to helping people eliminate the obstacles of artificial structures and embrace more organic flows of energy. She taught people about "deep learning", tapping into universal interconnectedness and understandings.

The common thread in women's stories referring to their spirituality in their work is its appearance as an ethic of community and a commitment of self to a purpose beyond the self's wants. The women who talked of spirituality in their learning felt that their work stood for something, contributed something meaningful. They talked openly of a transcendent power, whether power of energy or caring binding human beings, power of interconnectedness linking all happenings in the universe, or a divine power, that propelled their purpose. They noticed and accepted mysteries, like 'coincidences', as having unexplainable purpose. Liz said, "I just began attracting to me things and people that helped take me to next steps", like the contractor that came in looking for a volunteer experience precisely at the time when Liz was flummoxed by a program dilemma, a contractor who "just clicked" with Liz to form what became a rich team experience.

These women were not naively relativistic, accepting all expressions of individuality and multiple perspectives as equally valid. They appeared to sense inner agency compelling their learning at work. This agency in their workplace practice was not often focused specifically on a clearly defined desired outcome or concrete goal. Instead they seemed roused to a general sense of commitment to whatever they felt to be their life-intention, a purpose or calling to express their unique capabilities in ways that served, helped, and made a meaningful contribution to humanity.

For some who described themselves as Christian, this seeking flowed directly from their relationship with God and God's purpose. Their vocation was part of their mission as humans serving God. "God needs me places and I was led there," explained Persephone, who believed that there was a divine reason for everything including the work opportunities that she was able to discern. She struggled to balance the vocational directions in which she believed she was being guided by her faith, and the practical issues of salary and family needs. Should she go back to university and study theology and adult education? Should she tolerate the controlling and uncommunicative boss who restricted her creative freedom to meet the overwhelming needs of her client groups? Should she seek a better-paying job even though she knows she is needed in her current work? Most of all, she struggled to let go of her own will of self- determination, and listen to God.

Marilyn said she felt "compelled" to do many of the things that have scared her: "God needs risk-takers." As she explored options of work now, she was wondering above all: "What am I supposed to be doing? What lesson am I supposed to be learning here?" She had a sense of being called, of being prepared for a task, a niche -- which is why she said she kept telling herself, Be still and listen. Her hardest struggles were on the days when she longed for activity, to project herself into the world and feel again that reassuring sense of material accomplishment, of the self 'progressing'. She compared the feeling to being pregnant, with the fullness and the same peculiar combination of impatience and contentment in waiting.

The dimension of spirituality, while probably implicit in much theorizing about subjectivity, has been neglected in explicit analysis. Theories of women's subjectivity have been liberated by scholarship exploring discursive constitutions of power, meanings of women's sexuality and corporality, social practices as these circulate power, and the hegemony of "identity" which becomes transfixed in humanist insistences upon the free, stable, identifiable, rational subject. Spirituality may have potential to open the dialogue in two ways. First, understandings of the "soul" may help reconcile the urge to avoid essentializing, with many humans' felt sense that they are indeed propelled by an inner, unvarying essence; "soul" might be separate from but entwined with momentary and fragmented "selves" in the improvisation of identity. Second, theorizing spirituality as part of understanding or "mapping" subjectivity may help transcend and ignore the continuing dichotomization of individual agency and structuration through social practices and discursive systems. A common thread in the literature of various faith traditions conceptualizes "spirit" as interconnective energies, a force or Holy Spirit or divine essence on earth. Such understandings may help explore the question of agency, recover or "reconstitute" a positive notion of the post-modern subject, and enable a political praxis.

The Significance of Self in Contemporary Theoretical Debates

The focus on self is not meant to fetishize the self, but to decolonize the human subject -- what the anthropologist Cohen (1994) calls "the neglected self" -- from its subordination to macro-perspective narratives generalizing individuals' "empowerment" for societal change or "improvement" for corporate advantage, an increasing tendency in adult education in general and workplace education in particular. The uniqueness and privacies, as well as certain autonomous choices of the complex self as it unfolds, are being occluded.

In the past, much theorizing about self in the adult education canon has accumulated around the node of "adult development". Stage theorists such as Erikson (1982), Levinson (1986), Gould (1978) and various Jungian theorists; "transition" theorists such as Bridges (1991) and Schlossberg (1984), "life events" theorists such as Sugarman (1986) and Hultsch and Plemons (1979), each offer explanations towards understanding the growth and change of the adult self -- variously described as the ego, personality, or identity. Critique of this work tends to focus on its absolutism, its deterministic assumptions, and its failure to acknowledge significant differences in self-development among individuals and particular cohorts of adults (Pile and Thrift, 1995; Taubman, 1992; Usher and Edwards, 1994; Usher, 1995). In the past decade increasing critical attention has examined the limits of the psychological focus of developmental theories, which tend to ignore important dimensions of context such as power relations connecting the self to other people, historical influences, and socio-cultural-political dynamics affecting the growth and expression of the self. Such dimensions are especially important in a discussion of self as it develops in work.

A significant gap in the scholarship exploring adult learning in work, whether grounded in critical theory (Cunningham, 1993; Collins, 1992; Hart, 1992) or in human capital ideology (Senge, 1995; Marsick and Watkins, 1994), is its historical lack of attention to the idiosyncrasies and constructions of self. Perhaps in certain preoccupations with understanding either the oppressive structures of the workplace and the process of emancipating of the individual, or with understanding how best to subjugate the individual to meet the "needs" of industry and the economy, the individual's complexity has been somewhat diminished. The macro-perspective has turned attention away from the important micro-perspective of individual agency: how, within the forces and relations of discourse and social practice, the person exercises power to understand, nurture and express the self, and how learning unfolds within this dialectical process.

The self, agency, and society

Cohen (1994) claims that this tension for inquirers into human meaning and action between the relative powers of social determinism at one pole of thought and individual agency at the other is a long-standing one. His recovery of a focus on self affirmed my sense of the importance of understanding the self-invention as it produces a person's intentions, orientations to the world and thus the person's ability to perceive disjunctures, and her positionality. Cohen argues in his book Self-Consciousness for the need to recover an understanding of the importance of the self's consciousness of its own authorship in determining intention, creating its own conduct, and helping produce the social forms in which it participates:

> Societies do not determine the selves of their members. They may construct models of personhood; they may. . . . attempt to reconcile selfhood to personhood. But they have no absolute powers in this regard, and almost certainly have an exaggerated view of the extent to which they can clone their members. I think of society and self dancing an improvised pas de deux : each tries to cover the moves of the other; sometimes they merge, at others they separate. Their combination may be harmonious; or it may be awkward in the extreme. Society creates the illusion (which social science has perpetuated) that it ultimately controls the dance, for it provides the music and the stage. But, to coin a phrase, it takes two to tango. To focus on only one of the partners is a very skewed look indeed. (Cohen, 1994, p. 71)

Giddens (1991) describes the self as a reflexive project, having to sustain itself through continuous reflection and revision. The problem for the self, claims Giddens, is maintaining its ontological security in a culture threatening its fundamental stability and referent points for its existence. The self is made reflexively, continually adjusting itself to the exigencies of its societal and institutional expectations, and inventing itself through reflection upon its own biography of performance against these expectations. The urge to ontological security is certainly confirmed in the data of this study, although Giddens presents this security as far more fixed and preoccupied with anxiety than the stories of these women demonstrate. But the main problem I have with Giddens' argument is his presentation of the self as determined. The only power of agency accorded to the self is its reflectivity, and its potential to perpetuate the actions determined for it by larger forces. The self is thus denied the power of originary action and creativity, or access to any power within or outside itself that is not pre-structured by its location in the societal matrix.

Theoretical understandings of self in relationship to structures

There are three kinds of structures that can threaten dissolution of restriction of the self, all of which are entangled as different namings of the way power produces form in the fluidity of the universe. One has been theorized extensively by post-structuralists as the structures of language. For Foucault, discourses and the institutions and practices that sustain them, are social forces that produce knowledge. Power circulates as a multiplicity of force relations in a process through which these relations are created and modified through struggle, confrontation, transformation. What people name as power they often have mistakenly believed to be "permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing" but in fact what they are seeing is the effect of multiple complex and fluid relations (Foucault, 1980, pp. 92-93). Some criticism against the focus on language in the post-structuralist position accuses it of disregarding material reality, which in the workplace consists of forces and relations of production, particularly commodity production, that constitutes identity and everyday life-in-work. But the post-structuralist response is that language itself is material -- that practices and relations constructing people's lives and sense of self are produced within a complex system of signs and signification. "It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable" (Foucault, 1980, pp. 100-101).

Another way of conceptualizing the structures both defining and threatening the boundaries of self is to examine the way different identities configure themselves and each other to both distinguish and position themselves in relationships. This study has already established the importance of positionality that shapes knowledge of the self through the distance achieved from the other's gaze. Oliver (1992) states "the fundamental problem of Western philosophy is the status of "not I", or the "other", in relation to ourselves. Western philosophy, based on Augustine's meditations, assumes an egoistic, individualistic self, which underpins the Western imperialistic posture towards the world. This "I" is alone, fighting for "I-ness" among the other threatening entities of the world that encroach on "I-ness". Alienation is the natural product of an egoistic "I". The "I" that views itself as separate from others must see them as "things", as objects. This view then reinforces the "I's" alienation, a being (or a being in the process of becoming) that is never quite sure what the objects around it are, or what they'll do. This "I" suspects that other objects function as it does, likewise trying to consume, possess, in an attempt to extend the "I" by projecting itself onto the world, including the "others". The search to end alienation driven by this "I" that creates its own separateness through its view, is expressed in a will to power, to control, to "normalize" the others to mirror itself.

A third way to examine structures is through Nietzsche's conceptualizing of Apollonian forms imposed on what he terms the Dionysian reality, the entire chaotic realm of eternal motion and flux including the energy which is human life, to control, as well as to obscure and deny. Pinar (1994) shows the value of this concept in performing the archaeology of self that for Pinar is the crucial essence of learning. In Nietzsche's depiction of form and flux, Apollo, the god of plastic powers, fixes the limits of self and culture through the illusion of form. Apollo is an artificer, manifested in the historical force of reason attempting to actively de-limit the chaotic flux of the Dionysian forces. In the Western construction of identity, culture is humankind's desire to repel the daemonic liquidity of Dionysus. Apollo, the god of reason in classical western mythology, represents the western need to see things in terms of form. Apollonian power-play, using rules and order as humanity's greatest defense against the void, has become the bases for social institutions -- art, religion, education -- and especially the formal economy which of course configures the modern workplace. Apollonian structures strangle possibility as well as liberate creativity. Art may be order, but Order is not necessarily kind, beautiful, or just. Each of these conceptualizations of reality and the demarcation of self in relationship to reality presents a vision of structures and energy in conflict.

Understanding the boundaries separating self and other

For many of the women, after they had learned the skills and knowledge they needed to function comfortably and competently in a particular workplace, after they had learned to understand and listen to the people around them, there came a time when they became more attuned to their self as an object of knowing. Heidegger (1977) presents Dasein as the spirit of a person who seeks to find the "boundaries" of existence: to reach out beyond the self, to extend the self in knowledge, to assert individuality and find the promise of "freedom". In their work-lives, these women were inserting themselves into communal activity in a way that both revealed the boundaries of their identity and suggested its possibilities.

Tauber (1992) describes the experiencing self in a philosophical context as actively searching for self definition in an evolutionary process. Working from Nietzsche's philosophy, Tauber explains that this search propels the will to struggle, particularly against nihilism. The self is always becoming, striving to overcome. He believes the will to power is at the source of all human intentions, a power that will nourish itself and sustain the struggle to define the self against the chaos of life. The central question for Tauber is, where is the source for the will to power? Does it stem from the individual's struggle to resolve conflict and achieve harmony? Or to assert the will and construct the self?

What does it mean to "set boundaries" in the workplace? A boundary is a line demarcating the edges that distinguish one thing from another, or what is 'me' from what is 'not-me'. This is how individuals establish form, by drawing boundaries to give rational order and structure and identity to a world of experience that is otherwise fluid energy. In the stories of these women, boundary-setting often had to do with making choices: what tasks she would or would not do, what jobs she would or would not attempt, what level of personal commitment and energy she would or would not give to this project. In terms of learning, boundary-setting is a crucial act. When individuals draw a line, when they say "no" to an opportunity, they are protecting themselves but also refusing to learn from it. For a person who typically craves learning challenges and the stimulation of attempting something new, who seeks to give self and energy to others and to the creative whole of a project, the act of setting boundaries is a political positioning of self which compromises some basic principles of being.

The ability to set boundaries grows as the construction of self becomes stronger and clearer to a person, coupled with bad work experiences a person doesn't want to repeat. Often these "bad" work experiences were situations that drained the women's sense of personal power, that evoked emotions of helplessness, a sense of being trapped into acting out experiences that were painful. Pain is having to work in ways that don't fit for a person.

The postmodern concern: Language and the illusion of a fixed self

The postmodern perspective is skeptical about the conventional notion of self. Postmodern theorists question whether the self really is as unified, singular, rational, self-determining, independent, centered in the world and anchored (Lyotard, 1984; Hawkesworth, 1989; Vattimo, 1988) as human beings, or at least human beings trapped in modernist or humanistic worldviews, seem to want to believe. Some postmodern theorists also question the validity of inquiry through life history. The humanist process of developing autobiography presumes that the past is fixed, summonable, and knowable, that experiences are masterable, and that there is a meaning to be discovered -- the real me. From a postmodern perspective, Usher (1995) argues that an autobiography "is not immediately referential of a life but is instead a work of artifice or fabrication that involves reconstructing the self through writing the self" (Usher, 1995, p. 179). The notion of human progressive 'development' and other conventional structures of human life history are in fact, claim post-modernists, 'grand narratives' (Lyotard, 1984) that are oppressive because they lack reflexivity and do not know themselves as constructions.

They obscure the reality of human experience as fragmentary, and of selves as multiple and de-centered. Thus according to this view, people's sense of self, and their experiences, their relationships, and their memories that create their selves, are all created through language. And language is rooted in a contextual, particular moment of time.

As Steiner (1989) points out, such logic is difficult to refute from inside the framework of its own assumptions. However, the women in this study indicated their general belief that their adult growth was a dual process: unpeeling "layers" to discover or reveal what at core is an essential, authentic self, and creating moment-by-moment new dimensions and perspectives of self. There was no question of their views of their self being remotely consonant with the postmodern protest that the self is illusory, the product of a linguistic social construction. Instead, the common search of most of these women seemed to be for the stable coherent and deeply meaningful self, which most seemed to assume lay underneath the barriers of surface turmoil that their life-choices were creating. The inner self was reified, almost thought of as precious in the sense of a gift that a mortal can't fully comprehend but can spend a lifetime trying.

Feminist post-structuralists such as Luke (1992) or Orner (1992) might point out that work provides the norms of practice, forces of social relation, and power of discourse within which women's subjectivity is inscribed. Women either slide into this subjectivity or struggle to free themselves from it. But the predominant pattern I discerned among many of these women over the life-span of their work-histories is one of nurturing the growth of the self as though the self were a child. They nurture the self within the context of work activity and the workplace community, in a dialectic which both affirms and disciplines this self while learning to understand it. This intensively inner process of discovering and nurturing does not deny that the self is social and identity is socially constructed.

The coherent self

Is there a coherent self, as many of these women seemed to believe? The post-structuralist position chiefly associated with Foucault and Derrida does not acknowledge a self existing outside the fluctuating contradictions of discourse as it configures social practice. What people think of as 'the self' is, in the post-structuralist worldview, entirely constructed in language which slides ephemerally as meaning changes from one historical, particular, intersubjectively constructed moment to another. Flax (1990) suggests that this view ignores a coherent self beyond or beneath text, and that those who postulate identity as linguistically constructed and fragmented have failed to understand the basic cohesion within themselves that allows us to experience fragmentation without dissolving into psychosis, losing all boundaries between self and objects and others.

Lather (1991) rejects the idea of self as stable and authentic, but in understanding women's self-knowledge she does not accept the skeptical view that the self has dissolved entirely in discourse: "Decentering is not so much the elimination of the subject as it is the multi-centeredness of action, a re-conceptualization of agency from subject-centered agency to the plurality and agency of meaning" (Lather, 1991, p. 120). Usher (1995), in addressing the methods of autobiography in adult education, argues for re-writing the story of self to deconstruct the dominant self of the story, decenter the self, accept fragmentation and the continuing invention and reinvention of the self, instead of being so preoccupied with endless searching for the "true self".

West (1995) counters that allowing the idea of self to dissolve in a celebration of openness and fragmentation may endanger the very psychological security and the need for a coherent self-narrative that individuals require to survive in today's turbulence. In fact, forcing the deconstruction of self may produce resistance and even paralysis of individuals, rather than the openness to the fluidity of experience that postmodernists try to encourage. West suggests that it is possible "to regard subjectivity as largely socially constituted without abandoning the idea of self altogether. Indeed, a dynamic struggle for selfhood -- for some coherence, integrity, authenticity, inner security and integration . . . may be a survival imperative" (West, 1995, p.190).

The real self

Is there a "real" self outside the self in work, an inner self distinct from the outer self? Bohm, a physicist who is cited by Senge (1990) and Dixon (1993) to illustrate the relevance of his ideas for understanding the post-modern self and its relationship to community, describes reality as existing on two levels: the implicate order is a deep structure underlying the mutable uncertainty and chaos of the surface. Lebra (1992) suggests that there is an inner and a social self (p. 126), the inner self being an essence that is coherent and enlightened. Sumara (1993) argues for a fictive self that is created to act in one's professional practice as separate and distinct from the authentic self. The post-structuralist emphasis on language, however, repudiates such notions of surface reality distinct from "deep structure" as falsely assuming that meaning is divorced from its signifiers. Language is not a megaphone reporting understandings that exist outside its signs; language *is* meaning, and thus the reality of the self is what it represents itself to be through its own and others' language.

Grumet (1990) replies to the post-structuralist position by re-confirming her conviction that experience, not language, forms the essence of identity. She rejects the notion that "we, scribbling in our diaries, or squinting at our word processors, merely imagine that we are composing the original word that brings a new thought to expression" (Grumet, 1990, p. 321). She acknowledges that the post-structuralist argument of linguistic determination holds some legitimacy: "I would be naive if I refused to admit influence in what we notice, what we choose to tell, and in how and why we tell what we do" (Grumet, 1990, p. 324). But, she asserts, the self is not a fiction imprisoned in discursive constructions. The self is recognizable precisely in its struggles for determination, and its resolve to develop and transcend its bonds (Grumet, 1990, p. 324). This struggle, and the creative impulse, are compelling evidence of human will, or what I have described as intentionality in the broad sense of fundamental human agency. I am convinced through the findings of this study of the primacy of intentionality, and particularly that the intention to seek, to struggle, and to create, cannot be reduced to predetermined discursive formations. The longings that appear to drive the search, and the nature of the struggle, can be understood in part as a spiritual hunger.

The self and spirituality

Spirituality is defined differently by different people, with different sources, foundations, and goals. Mack (1992) suggests that spiritual understandings or experiences allow access to an invisible world of power separated from humans in time (i.e., people enter it after death) or in space (people say "spiritual domain" as if it's a separate place, even psychological space). With the development of spirituality humans gain the insight and openness to enter this world and integrate it with their everyday lives in the gritty realm of material reality.

Spiritual guides, from new-age prophecies to dissertations on angels, have recently pervaded the self-help best-seller market. In October 1994, Maclean's magazine published a cover story on "The New Spirituality: Mainstream North America Searches for Meaning in Life." The questions it claims people are asking with compelling rigor in late modernity are traditional questions of philosophy, theology, and everyday life asked by humans seeking to understand their place in the world. They are the questions that many women in this study seemed most preoccupied with in their reflections on learning in the workplace: Is this all there is? What is my purpose on earth, in a community of humanity? What meaning do I have? How best can I fulfill my purpose? What should I do to live well the life intended for me?

The hunger compelling these questions could be interpreted as a search to make sense out of the disorder that seems apparent in everyday lives, a firm belief that somewhere there can be discerned a pattern that reconciles life's ambiguity and difficulty, and places this self in an important position in the universe. The spiritual search may be a longing for connections with other people, and a wish to act in love. This seeking appears to emanate from a yearning to walk with a higher power or a transcendent energy, and to liberate this energy within one's self. These three themes: acknowledging a mysterious pattern and seeking purpose for self within this pattern, interconnections of energy, and a sense of personal connection to some transcendent power, infused many women's stories of spirituality in their work.

Oliver (1992) argues, working with the philosophies of Buber, Eckhart, Nishida Kitaro and orthodox Christianity, that the true self is a spiritual reality. The self is a no-self: it dissolves in the act of experiencing the world. To know the true self, the no self, the relational self, is to be one with God. One can't speak of the self without reference to a Deity. To be is to be in communion, to open to the indwelling of the spirit. Buber's logic of the I-Thou (the two are distinct but not separate, there is a unity) and Eckhart's notion of the no-self (the self is God's self) illustrates the direction of the spiritual journey: striving to relinquish the self's need to will its own purposes and determine its own expression, to accept stillness, and to recognize that the self is what it is now -- being, not becoming.

Mack (1992) suggests the spiritual search is for connection, to escape the alienating power and regulation of modern society with its urges to dominate, acquire, possess, and control. The spiritual experience, explains Mack, is one of harmony and peace, living interconnectedly with all people. A spiritual life renounces possession, materiality, and goals of purposiveness and instrumentality. A spiritual life embraces a more fluid existence of seeking, and understanding, and valorizes intuition, feeling, and openness.

Mothering the self

The notion of "mothering" conceptualized as a way of integrating learning, life, and work has been proposed by Hart (1992) as a radical perspective in workplace learning theory. This concept appears to have powerful implications for understanding how many women in this study construe their journey of self-knowledge through their work. Hart repudiates the dominant ideology privileging commodity production as the legitimate definition of "work" in the formal economy, as dehumanizing people, destroying human creativity, spirit, and capacity for caring. Hart suggests that what she describes as "subsistence work" holds promise to nurture and develop humanity. Subsistence work acknowledges as its ultimate purpose to maintain and improve life, thus shifting the function and focus of production from things to people. Subsistence work places a primary orientation upon use rather than possession and consumption of products and services.

Subsistence work emanates from an ecological relationship between worker, activity, tools and objects of work, which Hart describes as "mimetic nearness". Mimetic nearness is based on a model of mothering: the mother submits to the concrete, specific needs of the person being cared for in an existential dwelling in the child as the object of work. The mother's need for control is contained by her respect for the child's independent reality and by her concern for its growing autonomy. The mother's knowledge can never be finished or absolute but must remain tentative and provisional. She is in contact with the continuously changing nature of her child: while she nurtures and disciplines the child, she is continuously responsive, acknowledging and adjusting herself and her authority to its independent unfolding reality.

The epistemology that can be developed out of the experience of mothering is characterized by non-dichotomous relationships between the knower and the object of knowing, between the natural and the social, between critical judgment and empathetic intuition, between reason and emotion, and between the subjective and the objective (Hart, 1992, p. 190). The relationship, constituting "subsistence work" and ultimately developing mutual knowledge, stresses complexity and change, and acknowledges the other's unique individuality.

Hart intends that this metaphor of mothering will suggest new ways for people to approach one another and the activities and projects comprising their work. Their work, which is also the focus of knowing, is in Hart's conceptualizing reconfigured as children with concrete needs who develop and require a dynamic responsiveness that is attentive to these changing needs. The mother-knower submits to the object of work-knowing by existentially dwelling in it through the bond of care, but also retains authority that is limited by the "child's" growing autonomy and individuality.

Hart's presents her notion of "mimetic nearness" borrowed from an analysis of mothering chiefly to propose new ways for educators to approach learners for purposes of creating developmental possibilities of sustenance and nurturing human growth in the workplace. Understood in this way, her concept still relies upon an agent external to the individual such as an adult educator or perhaps a manager in the workplace to initiate and sustain the pedagogical relationship that will empower the self. But I believe the metaphor of mothering with its "mimetic nearness" as Hart outlines it may be helpful in understanding the ways women in this study came to know and honor what they understand to be their "inner" or "authentic" self.

In this study, the sources of strength and courage that allowed many of the women to seek challenge and change and take the necessary risks that enabled their continuous learning in the workplace, seemed to originate from their own nurturing of self. Hart's (1992) depiction of the mother-knower and the child-object of knowing seems to capture elegantly the inner relationship that appeared to exist in many of these women. Many of these women in their adult lives apparently have oriented themselves to nurture, discipline, care for and come-to-know their "self" as if it were a child. They often alternately dwell in the self and keep distance from the self as an authority. They often adjust their choices and guidance of this self to their developing understandings of its growing knowledge and unique differentiation from others, from activity, from its past manifestations, and from the knower.

In other words, these women come to be knowers, and become conscious of themselves as knowledge producers, when they mother themselves, when each becomes an educator of her "self" in Hart's terms. This sense of what might be thought of as an auto-pedagogical relationship is holistic, and has little to do with a continuing preoccupation in the adult education literature with "self-directed" learning. This mimetic nearness is an embrace of self established through caring for the object of self and commitment to an epistemological as well as an ontological journey. Baudrillard (1990) states that "the further you travel the more clearly you realize that the journey is all that matters" (p. 168). Experience is unfinished and continually open, there is no clear path from here to there, there is no deep meaning which will be revealed under the apparent chaotic surface of our lives. Baudrillard believes freedom comes when people stop seeking to find a central pattern in life, in work, or in self. Yet for these women the act of seeking, and the learning it generated, was freedom itself.

Liz believed that her most important learning, which she's only now focusing on after a few decades in the workplace, is about herself. The more she understands herself, she says, the better able is she to understand other people. Many of the women explained that as they learned to spend more time listening and connecting with others, they found themselves understanding people, which better enabled them to make sense of their own situations. Persephone found that through her experiences in pastoral counseling of helping others to heal, she learned how to help herself heal and grow. She had suffered family violence, abuse and embittering pain, but was gradually able to understand, accept, and "let it go" through her learning from helping others do the same. Reciprocally, mothering herself to learn and heal her own pain motivated her more to reach out and help others.

"The better I feel about me, the better I feel about work. Anything I can do to grow and mature personally, I bring that to work with me." Liz spent time now trying to make sense of the patterns of self-growth she sees reflected in her career life over the years. She talked about her self as evolving from fragmented compartments to a wholer, more integrated and authentic self. Her work self and home self used to be split apart in two separate circles: the responsible smiling Liz used to be left in the office when she returned home first to an alcoholic husband and then single parenting, "crying and raving to the kids, poor as a church mouse." The meditative, emotional Liz was carefully hidden away when she entered the workplace. But gradually she found herself viewing her home situation with the gaze of her supervisory self: "When you gain confidence, you can take that home with you, right? ... I took the growth step, I took ownership. I quit blaming everyone else. I made a choice. I took responsibility." As her home life improved, she began sharing her inner life at work, to connect with people in the office in human, authentic ways. The two circles, boundaries of different lives, came closer together, said Liz, and finally integrated so that now "I feel serene, inside and outside. I feel genuine." Sarah told a similar story of developing the strength of self that got her through a personal crisis, through success in her work activity. She described her husband's leaving as "a hit-and-run accident. . . . I'm lying on the crosswalk, hurt, and somebody has to go and get the ambulance, the doctors have to come and put the bones together." At first she was victim, waiting for others to clean up the mess and fix the problem. Little by little, she scored small triumphs doing things she'd never attempted before on her own, like backing a large trailer into a parking spot. "I thought, I can do this. I said it over and over, I can do this. This is okay."

Bateson (1990), who wrote a book about the lives of five women, views women-in-everyday life as composers: "Because we are engaged in a day-by-day process of self-invention -- not discovery, for what we search for does not exist until we find it -- both the past and the future are raw material, shaped and reshaped by each individual." (p. 28). Marilyn reflected with some sadness on the career self she watched in four-year-old scripts: "it causes me grief, I didn't like who I was in those circles." Yet she cherished this past self as a vital if 'younger' part of her. "I'm beginning to see my life more than a series of steps, I'm seeing my life as a flower unfolding, a constant unfolding." Thus Marilyn seemed to embrace all of her past expressions and intentions and even inchoate knowledge of self as part of her current self, and continuous with this self. She didn't seem to recognize the existence of an "I" which stood outside this self, growing to understand the self while it was bound in a dialectic of mutual caring and guidance. She alternately chastised her self and delighted in watching her self explore itself, like the big whiteboard she showed me shyly yet proudly on which she'd drawn over a period of months a large colourful mind-map of her longings and personal gifts. Each new job project, both paid and unpaid, conjured slightly new expressions of her self that she puzzled over, empathized with, encouraged and appreciated or reprimanded. This is somewhat reminiscent of Hart's (1992) depiction of the mothering relationship. The important dimension in the 'auto-pedagogical' mothering of self is that the "I-mother" is learning and changing in relationship to the increasingly differentiated and expressive child-self. But while the child-self appears to be available to self-reflexive scrutiny, the I-mother is apparently submerged in the epistemological act of caring and actively seeking-to-know, and incapable of critical self-reflexion. That is, the part of mind that is engaged in self-reflexive turning-over of assumptions and meaning perspectives exists in the instrumental action of critical reflection, and thus cannot be simultaneously reflexive of itself.

Janis found her stability within her own self-exploration. Like some of the other women, she conceived her self as essentially autonomous. She may have sought to find fit temporarily with this or that workplace organization or to create her own working community, to nurture her social needs for belonging and creative synergy with others. But she did not view her self as fundamentally a part of these communities, but as an individual with her own unique growth spiral, moving in and out and among and through multiple overlapping organizations at various times of her life. The coherent thread was herself, and she ultimately relied only on her self. Tracking and interpreting her own dreams, reflecting upon and mapping what she construes as her life's "journey", she concluded that there were outward journeys, quests going out-in-the-world, and inward journeys. Multiple outward and inward journeys overlapped, mirrored each other, and shaped one another:

> Both heroic journeys (the more outward and the more inward) are circular and never-ending. One can always come to a deeper understanding of the outer world and the inner world and the ways the two are connected...any journey of world mastery inevitably impacts on the inner world. Likewise any journey of ripening or deepening inevitably changes who one is in the day-to-day world. Circular diagrams of the heroine's journey recall images of ouroborous, the snake eating its tail, and of snakes shedding their skins. Each heroic journey is a shedding of one's skin because one has grown -- in depth and breadth of vision, in understanding of the world, in knowledge of Self. --Janis

Audrey said that one of her most important learnings through her work life had been learning "to like myself. So much of who we are is tied to an attitude of our self. If you don't like yourself, what's inside is mirrored outside. I'm convinced that's an ultimate truth." She talked of the peace in her life now, working at home at her own pace on her own instructional design business. Her old selves-in-work -- kindergarten teacher, real estate salesperson, community activist -- seemed to be different forms for the fluid self. Meanwhile the self slipped and slid under the forms, never really changing substantively. As Irigaray (1985) writes, "In truth woman, truth will not be pinned down" (p. 55).

The power of the self-in-work is evident in Catherine's description of her consulting business: "My workplace learning doesn't exist outside my business. I am it. I am my work." Catherine's creative projects, like writing articles and currently a book, were linked directly to the development work she did with organizations, and the things she learned through that work. She held "learning circle" meetings in her home, gatherings of friends who explored different ways of learning, or allowed Catherine to experiment with a new workshop activity to promote people's learning. Her learnings in these meetings formed the foundation for her further work developing learning organizations. Her friends were her work associates, her husband was her business partner.

Janis's creative work, she claimed, liberated her self: "Animation helps me tap into the inner life force, helps to animate me. The technical skills are important, but more important is the letting go, the finding your own voice as an artist, finding the character and letting it take on a life of it's own. You have to acknowledge and give voice to your own inner issues to work well. The life force that gives you joy makes your work good, makes your animations really come to life."

Mothering the self is, for many of these women, a fundamental growth activity that not only reveals and develops the self, but also enables the self to open to the world by accepting risk and seeking challenge that seems to be an essential posture of learning. This growth activity is often situated in the communal sphere of the workplace, and initiated and sheltered within activities that are valued as "work". The relationship of "I" to self is characterized by the "mimetic nearness" and reciprocity of knowing as it intersects with authority, respect and caring that is similar to the dimensions of mother-child relationships that Hart (1992) extends to conceptualize "sustenance work". Through this mothering of self in work, women developed their power of agency and extended the creative impulse. As the self grows through work, it becomes aware of the structures of language and social practice within which it struggles to define its uniqueness. Women who mother their selves help it shake free of these structures in a dialectic of awareness: as the self comes to presence in and through language, it is able to adapt its relation, change itself, alter the structures threatening to enslave it through language and action, or flee.

Mothering the self begins with recognizing that knowledge of self is the most important pursuit of a learner. Mothering is expressed through the exercise of power to confirm, inhabit, encourage, and guide the growth of self through experience, either performative or reflective experience. The most effective mothering "I" gradually learns to focus on the unique individuality (different than individualism) of the self, rather than the deficits of the self in comparison to artificial regulatory norms such as those perpetuated in many workplaces. But to develop this capability, the mothering "I" had to develop the confidence and knowledge of what is to be celebrated as special about the self, through watching and naming the self-in-action. When the mothering "I" develops maturity and understanding of the child "self" to the point where it can accept the being of self as "becoming", a peace with self is possible. Both Elizabeth, Audrey, Liz and Elana talked explicitly about the relief of "letting go" the struggle to keep up with impossible expectations, hide imperfections and idiosyncrasies, and pretend expertise -- and "finding peace."

The foregoing discussion must be situated in the community of others, who reciprocally shape both the mothering I and the mothered self. The ongoing growth of understanding of self-in-relation to others unfolds with the development of self-knowledge. The outward movement towards a sense of interconnectedness, the appreciation and acceptance even if only intellectually of self as bound inextricably with other selves, embraces the inward movement towards a core of stability.

This beginning examination of themes emanating from women's stories of coming to know self casts a different image of subjectivity than the humanistic self-determining individual whose central lifelong learning project is to develop a unified, self-actualized self that is sensible to a linear imagination. From the perspective of many of these women, their sense of self in work was multiple, shifting, and nomadic. Pleasure derived from experiencing a flow of energy both from inside and from outside, flowing through the self, that animated their performativity and connected them with other people and the material world. This energy was experienced variously by different women in different situations as passionate engagement, as propulsion to travel, as interior rhythm, as intuitive voice, and as an aura of peace. Most of all, the women asserted what for many was indisputable truth, the presence of an inner "authentic" core. Whether this core was thought of as self or as soul, it was listened to and cared for in a complex relation that was certainly situated, but transcended analyses focusing on discursive systems and social practices.

Connecting Self to Intention, Disjuncture, and Positionality in the Workplace

The movement of self, the direction of this movement, and the extent of a woman's knowledge of this movement establish directions and criteria that motivate intention and disjuncture. The sense of self-as-becoming creates a life-pattern of continuously striving, improving, learning: when a woman attains "competence" she often felt the urge to seek something new. She is constantly balancing: coming to know and nurture the self inside to grow in its own way, while comparing the self for "fit" with the world's, and particularly the workplace world's, expectations. Her position in a community reflects to her an image of herself, and this image partly determines how she represents herself to that community, in negotiating a position within it.

Her position to knowledge -- whether she views herself as a passive recipient of others' knowledge or as an active creator of knowledge, whether she views knowledge as personally connected or objectively removed (Belenky et al., 1986), is partially determined by her sense of self. The openness in position that is necessary to learning is at least partly determined by a sense of self, and a position of self relative to the threat of the unfamiliar being confronted. Following is a summary of themes presented in this chapter about growth of a woman's self in work.

The process of coming-to-know self depended upon and helped instill a person's valuing of self-knowledge, and her willingness to spend time and reflective thought in this pursuit. This process was incremental and recursive, not necessarily transformative. The process of women's learning about self through work occurred through her image as reflected through her actions, her image as reflected in her colleagues' gaze, and her image which accumulated in her work biography -- both what she had accomplished and the choices she had made, and past images of her self.

Finding a core of stability in a destabilized workworld appeared to be a central motive for coming-to-know self. Women learned to protect the self by deliberately naming boundaries and learning to discern the margins that define her work self, as separate from the community. Some of the women's most valued learnings about self through work were learning to trust their own voice, to rely on their own intuition, and to have confidence as learners. Constructing a self through work was a process of both making choices for action, influenced by personal and cultural disciplines and forces, and of coming-to-presence through language, influenced by the discourses constituting the workplace community. Choice-making and languaging, the dialectical processes weaving subjectivity, unfolded in reflection.

A significant characteristic of the movement of self-knowledge was when the women learned to accept the self as becoming, to accept continual flux and unending search for ways to give meaning to both the reflective and the acting the self-in-motion. This included developing a spiritual self that was integrated in work relationships.

Chapter 9

Conclusions on Learning in the Workplace

From the stories and meanings of workplace learning narrated by the women participating in this study are many themes which have practical value for those concerned with facilitating others' learning through work, especially other women. This chapter presents conclusions from the study findings from a pragmatic perspective, primarily intended for educators and researchers who seek to develop models of workplace education to facilitate the work of practitioners. These conclusions are compared where possible to themes in current literature on continuous learning in the workplace.

The chapter is organized in four sections. The first section discusses the learning process evident in women's workplace learning, and presents six key dimensions of this process. The second section addresses the kinds of knowledge that women most valued and sought to learn in the workplace, a section which speaks powerfully to issues of motivation of learning and the kinds of opportunities and experience that women tend to view as having learning potential. The third section presents "enhancers" to workplace learning, those conditions in the nature of work or the culture and organization of the workplace that women perceived to most facilitate their pursuit of the knowledge they value most. The fourth section lists "barriers" that women perceive to inhabit, their urge to learn and their natural ongoing processes of workplace learning. These barriers include both external conditions inhering in the workplace or community, and internal psychological and emotional conditions stimulated by particular kinds of work activity or workplace conditions that women believe can block their ability to learn.

The Process of Learning in the Workplace Experienced by These Women

This section draws together categories across the cases of the various women in order to examine the process of learning in the workplace. The four research questions initiating this study guide this synthesis: (1) How do these women view themselves as workers and learners? (2) How do these women understand the process of learning and changing their practice? (3) What do these women value in their workplace learning, and their experiences that create and change that learning? (4) What implications do these women's views have for others' understanding of work and workplaces, and for our own continued learning? Responding to these questions in a holistic way, six specific statements emerged illustrating dimensions of women's experience of workplace learning. Each of these six statements will be elaborated in detail in the sections which follow.

Workplace learning is recursive and grows increasingly integrated with other parts of these women's lives throughout their personal development and work history

When asked directly, many of the women had difficulty tracing and articulating the actual process of their workplace learning. Nor could these women point easily to particular "peak" learning experiences: it became subsumed in their knowledge, and they observed and reported on the effects of learning. The process of learning in work was often described as "osmosis" or "soaking it up" -- learning to distance self so as not to "take self" or the threatening situation too seriously. What remained was not the substance of knowledge but a sense of deepening or broadening self, and memories of the emotions of learning and what created these.

Women described themselves as being either "scattered" or "systematic" learners. Some felt they move in many directions simultaneously, that they were "alive" and open to many signals at once; others planned their work and learning according to a clearly defined goal, then scheduled and structured their concept formation in concrete ways along the learning path. Most of these women demonstrated confidence in approaching learning. They applied a deliberate strategy when facing a vaguely defined task or amorphous unfamiliar area of knowledge: they found a starting point, then pulled together the resources they knew how to use to find further questions and resources to guide their inquiry. Their willingness to adopt a humble stance was important: they proactively sought out people who could help them, and asked questions (voluntarily putting themselves in what Tannen (1995) would call a "one-down" position). When the learner was the one asking questions, the learner was in control of the language, sequence, pace and meaning structure of the concepts and information that are being processed. It is significant that these women knew how to ask questions that were helpful to guide their own learning.

Most of the women described their propensity to approach life in a "learning" mode: being awake to the here-and-now, finding ways to view the familiar freshly, attempting to be discerning enough to name the moment and the reality in front of them, not trying to make it fit official codified knowledge. They approached new tasks and projects with a "what can I learn here" attitude. The learning was the goal, the expanding self and the opportunity to express it, NOT the resulting knowledge. They didn't think in terms of accumulating skills that they could apply again and again.

Workplace learning is recursive

The women in my study confirmed that their learning evolved in more "long, circuitous, circumscribed, and holistic" ways (Baskett, and Marsick, 1992, p. 12) than workplace training often allows. Learning is a continual circling back and folding-in of self-understanding to embody new ways of being. Workplace learning is not a process of "acquiring skills" like Post-It Notes, or filling knowledge gaps or "needs". Learning is usually not pre-planned, nor pre-formed and then "transferred". Learning unfolds within the task itself and continues to unfold in the reflective re-visitations of the experience. The knowledge these women perceived themselves to have learned in the workplace was not thought of as discrete observable competencies. Instead, most tended to understand their workplace learnings as holistic, as a process of the developing self.

Learning is woven among work and life in ways that are difficult to unravel

Most women's sense of work was attached to many contexts and types of activity in domestic, psychological, intimate, social, and spiritual spheres. The learning path itself was difficult to recall and articulate: once knowledge became embodied or tacitly embedded in practice the process seemed buried. A work "place" -- even for women who spend long periods working at home -- was typically pictured as "out there," attached to employing organizations. The women all stressed the extraordinary developmental significance and personal sustenance of their work. They also talked of the difficulties and their continual search to integrate their "work" and "non-work" selves.

What is named "learning" are those experiences that affirm, not rupture and overturn, belief systems integrated with the self's sense of identity and personal capacity

Women emphasized that their main focus, outside their concern for achieving excellence in their work and accomplishing something through their labor activity that made a meaningful contribution, is upon their developing self. They appeared to seek growth in two key ways: first, they strived to move toward congruence, examining what they'd said and done and attempting to align this behavior with what they believed and valued. Secondly, they expanded their style and repertoire. They tried new things, which might have included rethinking their rationales for doing particular skills. They tried different things, which might have meant attempting new techniques in familiar situations. They tried challenging themselves, which might have meant questioning basic approaches.

This expansion was not blind progress or continuous striving to reach an impossible ideal. Nor do these most of these women think of themselves as continually in deficit, not good enough, or requiring improvement. Expansion refers to growth, spiralling upwards or outwards or inwards. Growth is about movement in a way that feels like going forward to the individual, not inertia or remediation.

Despite the common emphasis in workplace learning literature on learning through examination of one's failures and perceived errors (Watkins and Marsick, 1993; Dixon, 1993), the stories of learning that these women told were their successes, the confirmations of their skills and self and ideas. All women attributed importance to ongoing trial-and-error as a way of submersing in the procedures and culture of a workplace community. But what they emphasized as the "learning" parts of this process were not the error, typically accompanied, especially when one is new to a community and task set by feelings of anxiety, guilt, or panic which inhibit innovative and problem-solving mental processes, but their gradually increasing competence in the skill.

Even when women described critical learning incidents that pivoted upon the trigger of a major error, the learning part of the experience for them was the happy-ending of their successful recovery and invention of something new. For example, Nancy's story of the prenatal course that flopped was a story of "trauma" and "devastation" until she came to the "learning" part of the tale: opening a free-flowing dialogue with the prospective parents about what to do, experimenting with their suggestions, and ending with a wonderful course.

To assume that the traumatic trigger is part of the learning is to ignore the fact that when there is no happy ending, where there is no return from the swamp of panic to the mode of unfolding-affirming oneself through expression in new skills and understandings, some women dismissed the incident and the people involved. The position they took was sometimes defensive, closed, adversarial.

When the women deliberately created a disjuncture -- as when they challenged the equilibrium of the status quo, they were often seeking freedom through imaginative possibility rather than the freedom from difficulty that problem-solving orientations to learning assume. Here again the learning is when the woman is in control of the disruption, and can guide her own process through the pain of disjuncture into the realm of creative process which is the domain of learning. This will be discussed further in the section on creativity, below.

The word "learning" was often attached to experiences that women found joyful and self-challenging. Learning moments they narrated were often the highs, the realization that, "Hey, I can do this!" Sometimes such moments gathered together and named past experience, as when a woman heard someone describe and thus call into presence and legitimize the knowledge without a name that she had come to believe and practice tacitly: the "Oh, yeah! I knew that!" moments. The women's emphasis was often on celebrating what they know and did well -- NOT on their continuing deficits, which happens to be the focus of any literature concerned with "continuous improvement", "value-added" skill training, "hit the ground running to keep up" (Beck, 1995).

An important focus of many women's workplace learning was discovering their own capabilities, often through their surprising demonstration in an activity that drew forth talents or a level of competence they didn't suspect themselves capable of achieving. Such discovery provided them with the confidence to stretch further, and thus a cycling spiral of risk-taking, innovation, reaching, and self-confirmation was put in motion to propel personal and professional growth. A good example is Liz's description of her own career, where the self-confidence and scope of ability that she gradually developed began to weave into her home life, touching a flame which catalysed her spiritual growth, and which in turn ignited new dimensions of capability, creativity and self-expression in her work.

Some women in this study demonstrated that they sought to center the work-self in an ethical purpose, in a foundation of values and moral determination that did not slide ephemerally according to the language of the moment or the community of their practice in any year. When they felt fragmented or alienated -- "scattered" in a situation that lacked direction and coherence with their basic sense of inner self, when they felt driven by external pressures and expectations rather than this internally directed ethical purpose, or when they felt "stuck" in a set of work demands that either constricted or didn't "fit", they were uncomfortable. Responses to such situations varied from desolation to lethargy to rage. Some found learning impossible in such situations, even for the most disciplined and self-directed of the women. Some seemed to enact a "learn and leave" pattern in their work history, which raises ethical questions about loyalty: what are the reasonable expectations of employer and employee for reciprocal loyalty in the current economy?

Such configuring of self in relation to community and work, and the dramatic nature of the responses, indicates the women's fundamental perception and protection of a unitary self, distinct from context: centered, seeking coherence, and willing to compromise with context, by shaping self to fit the community web and the personal identity embedded in the work demands but only to a cautious level that did not threaten the self's primary ontology. The emphasis for most women in their own work was constant seeking: seeking to uncover and understand their self's possibilities and the unitary threads of their self, seeking to ground and affirm the self, seeking freedom to determine their paths and express the self which they perceive as residing within, not constructed without. Despite the assertions of post-modern claimants that the self is de-centered, multiple, and shifting (Usher, 1995), many of these women revealed a sense of self that rang with an absolute moral certainty which appeared to transcend the charges of delusions of autonomy or of clinging to false ontological security during intolerably chaotic times (Giddens, 1991).

Workplace learning is more closely aligned with a creative process than a problem-solving process

Creativity and problem-solving are closely aligned: each process overlaps essential parts of the other. Perhaps the only difference lies in intent. Problem-solving tries to eliminate difficulty and restore equilibrium; creativity tries to disturb the equilibrium and generate new imaginative possibilities that may introduce difficulty (Prawat, 1993). Problem solving is reactive; creativity is proactive, often seeking to re-configure the status quo to find "problems", or opportunities for innovation. The problem-solving orientation is incompatible with a key finding of this study: that these women seek continuous challenges above all, and dread the stagnation of "problem-free" equilibrium.

The difficulty of conceptualizing "error" in organizational problem-solving

The problem-framing process, based on detecting error (Argyris, 1993), neglects the essential question in environments rocked by continuous change: who is defining what exactly constitutes error? A problem by definition is a condition perceived to require remedy, which assumes that the problem-perceiver has in mind a better vision based on certain evaluative criteria. Whose authority and interests determines these criteria? Who will agree to subvert their own intentions and bases for judgment to these criteria? A stable organization can determine and communicate clearly defined standards against which non-conforming situations and people are readily identifiable as "problems". But when organizations struggle with emerging visions, constantly changing procedures, and shifting benchmarks or standards defining quality and worthiness, how does one distinguish between a "problem" or "error" and a valuable innovation? How does an organization name what is a "problem" when evolving frameworks of meaning, complete with new terms and concepts, can instantly reconfigure a situation to represent a former "problem" as a "golden moment"?

Learning is thought of as innovating, not mastering

Learning as creating reinforces the self as unique, not having to constantly catch up to what others have already figured out. Approaching work through a frame of invention compels the energy and commitment that sustains learning -- the excitement of breaking new ground. This frontier excitement is very different than being pitted against existing ideals of competency or being measured by pre-determined performance standards.

A challenge or dilemma may present the incentive to launch forth on the road of "learning your way through" a new field of concepts, language, procedures, and issues. But the learning is the innovating that one does by manipulating the knowledge one encounters to improvise ways over the humps and around the stuck places. The learning is the activity of creating in response to challenges one cares enough to take responsibility for meeting: discerning the situation that needs to be addressed, conjuring a vision and monitoring its emergence over the course of the project, experiencing new spontaneous ideas, decisions, plans of action, and other unexpected responses being drawn forth from the self, and incorporating these into observable action that ends in concrete results. Janis's explanation of her parallel processes of film-making and learning provides a lucid example of workplace learning as the creative process. Their approach to a new area was always: What else? What lies beyond? What other ways can I do this? How can I make this mine?

Even women who adopted a position towards the workplace of management and control, using problem-solving regularly in their daily activity, had a creative approach to their learning. They were often able to envision a better reality. Catherine said, "I see what's there without the mountains," indicating that she recognized as temporary obstacles what others around her simply accepted as immutable mountains.

The presence of play in the creative process of learning

Creativity is about play, and these women refer often to the importance of play in their work and learning. Play in adult learning, as Melamed (1987) points out, is about holistic engagement, imaginative spontaneity, uninhibited freedom to "be myself", and relaxed experimentation. These women's stories of learning experience are threaded through with play. Stories of learning-work projects or an experience of a close working-learning community are marked by fun and shared laughter. Creating visions is described as "fun" work. Seeking resources to find answers to questions is "like a game". Many of the women naturally incorporated games into their work helping other people learn, or providing ways to cohere a unit in an organization. Taking risks -- learning by inventing new solutions or trying out new behaviors -- was lightened by their ability to laugh at themselves when something didn't work. Thus work was cast in the framework of play. When the women found themselves "taking things too seriously", an apparently common response in periods of workplace restructuring producing low morale and despair or destructive behaviors, they found ways to laugh: "What's the worst that can happen?" But as Elana struggled to explain, this ability to "stand back and laugh at it all" doesn't negate the commitment and personal accountability that she takes very seriously.

Many women in this study indicated that they didn't think of learning in terms of stockpiling or otherwise accumulating knowledge and skills. When a project was complete and all its problems had been solved one by one, they wanted to let go of the knowledge they'd developed and move on, not use the skills in a new project or spend time refining the skills. The learning journey was developing new insights and ways of practice towards inventing something new. This is a creative process, not a mastering or memorizing or problem-solving process.

The process of experiential learning in the workplace is meaning making, working with the text of embodied experience

For some of these women, their learning in the workplace often unfolded from a stance of inquiry: they sought to understand more deeply what was going on around them and inside people's heads, and what things meant. Unlike women who positioned themselves as problem-solvers in the workplace, some sought communicative knowledge by raising questions of inquiry to understand the world and other people for its own sake. They did not seek to subvert this knowledge to instrumental purposes, but to further probe meaning. The "going forward" nature of meaning making was always evident; where there was no new text to engage and understand, stagnation lurked.

But for most of the women in this study, particularly because many had to adjust to much change over the course of their working lives, they often had to re-think their position and ways of linking into their workplace community. Changing job demands or jobs, new policies and procedures governing their activity, new locations and communities governing work, new managers that construct new discourses, value bases and ideologies, new workplace cultures that had to be fitted into -- all required adjustment. To survive, every time there was a workplace change women had to figure out again: How should I act and be around here? To answer this, women often find their learning antennae focusing on, What do things really mean around here? What do people really value? How much of this is explicit, how much is implicit, how much is denied?

These kinds of questions are related to meaning making, a process which may be entwined with problem solving or creating processes, but is different in kind. Making meaning from the text of experience is like reading the text of a book, and thus reading theory offers much to our understanding of the experiential meaning making process.

Birkarts (1994), Britton (1970), Rosenblatt (1978), and other theorists on reading show that meaning making is an active process of construction, where the meaning maker weaves together perceptions from the text with background experience to produce idiosyncratic understandings that are free of the text itself. In other words, there is no objective meaning embedded in the text of a book or an experience, only the subjective and multiple meanings woven by different meaning makers actively engaging in the text. The process of meaning making understood as a reading process is recursive, and embraces the following dimensions of cognitive activity: establishing a purpose that guides perception; figuring out the organizing principle and language framing the meaning; decoding meaning from signs, signifiers and symbols within this organizational framework; making and checking inferences; imagining; locating patterns; speculating and confirming predictions; questioning the text and seeking responses; empathizing or making connections between self and text; backtracking; skipping forward; remembering and re-living and adjusting meanings; probing apparent meanings for embedded meanings; comparing previously formed meanings with new information; distancing and assessing meaning for validity, truth, trustworthiness, generalizability to self and the self's world.

The text of workplace experience

These dimensions are certainly part of the experiential learning process, and reading theory can help illuminate complexities of workplace learning when its focus is meaning making. But reading is still a cognitive activity. What is missing from this understanding of the learning process is the physical body, senses, and intuition. What is also missing is the multi-layered simultaneity of the text of living experience, with its press for involvement and action, its own pace controlling the work-learner's, and its high stakes. The text of workplace learning is not pre-packaged, thoughtfully organized into a linear stream of language. The text of workplace learning can neither be easily closed and put away when it becomes intolerably frightening or confusing, nor easily slowed down to re-read or dwell upon one difficult section of the action. Few dictionaries exist to aid the bewildered meaning maker in the workplace struggling with a text full of conflicting messages, contested meanings, shifting signs, and a thick flow of human matter and emotion that resists logic, clarity and pattern.

Questioning theoretical understandings of "experiential learning"

The women almost always claimed that they "learned by doing", or "by experience"; they liked "hands-on" learning, or claimed to be "pragmatic" learners. The critical incidents of workplace learning that they narrated almost always were located within the thick of experience.

Experiential learning, which is the framework through which these women view most of their workplace learning experiences, has been described by Kolb (1984) as a cycle alternating between action and reflection: a person tries to do something (concrete action), then steps back and questions what happens (reflective observation), then creates a generalized theory or principle to govern future action (abstract theorizing), and finally tries putting this theory into action (active experimentation). Marsick and Watkins (1990) developed a similar model to describe what they call "informal" learning in the workplace, although their work is based on what is fundamentally a problem-solving sequence of activity: while engaging in "intelligence activity" the worker-learner formulates the problem, designs an activity, designs a solution, chooses an activity, implements the solution, experiments, assesses results, and generally begins the cycle again. Their model for enhancing informal learning adds certain complexities to the action-reflection cycle such as emphasis on the problem formulation as a key part of the process, and encouraging critical reflection at each step (although Marsick and Watkins do emphasize that the cycle is fluid, not lock-step). Critical reflection, for Marsick and Watkins (1990) is identifying one's own assumptions, critiquing one's own beliefs, questioning the power structures, probing surprising outcomes, and reframing problems. Boud (1994) attempts to contextualize experiential learning with a model that builds upon Kolb's. Boud shows how environmental cues and responses to the learner's agency and intentions shape the way action and reflection unfold to produce learning. But the trigger of the learning is still understood to be a problem or dilemma encountered by the individual.

Thus the notion of "experience" in adult education literature typically embraces the two concepts of action and reflection. Because these are slippery concepts difficult to keep separate, they deserves some discussion. Reflection is an experience and so is reading. When these activities imaginatively or vicariously live out action, the individual's inner experience is not easily discernible from an experience inside "real life" action. Dialogue unfolds between simultaneous or asynchronous voices, between live human voices or remembered voices imaginatively recalled, between verbalized messages or abstract messages dialogued reflectively. "Real life" reflective dialogue and cybernetic reflective dialogue are both reflection and physical communicative experiences, but depending on an individual's positioning, engagement in, and emotional response to them, the experience might more closely resemble either meditation or physical action. Meditative reflection is sometimes an enormously physical experience. Physical experience sometimes reaches a peak where the mind transcends the sensory signals to enter an alternate state, which can only be described as reflection.

These are only some of the complexities of "experience", action and reflection, terms which despite a rich and lengthy philosophical tradition of exploring their nuances, have been used in experiential learning theory somewhat superficially. Nonetheless, the women in this study were quite clear about stating that they learned by experience. What they seemed to mean by "experience" is described below.

Dimensions of a workplace "experience" as it is engaged in a learning process

Experience with learning potential is rich in many signals, stimuli, signs, and people. There are multi-sensory simultaneous cues for different task demands. Most important, there is a press for "real" action that demands a response -- from the person who is learning. The situation actively interrogates the work-learner, drawing forth something inside her.

In the women's narrations of workplace experiences which they believed were important learning episodes, many parts of the experience seemed to influence what they learned: the richness of the experience (the layers of meaning embedded, or the scope of viewpoint), the nature of the learners' involvement (the part of the task for which they felt personal responsibility, their understanding at the time of the relevance of the experience to their purposes, and the nature and object of their later reflection on the experience).

Continuous learning literature emphasizes and privileges "big picture" understandings, what Peter Senge has termed the "fifth discipline" of "systems thinking". Women demonstrated that the scope of their job defined a particular system of people and tasks, whose framework then shaped their learning. The "big picture" perspective of systems thinking was only accessible and desirable to some. Women who managed a large department, or whose work aligned them with projects extending across many organizations, cared about, visioned for, and shaped their learning according to the "big picture". But many women whose workworlds and intentions were structured by the complex subsystems of their interpersonal connections with the lifeworlds of the clients in front of them, focused their meanings and learning according to what appeared most relevant in these microsystems.

For the women of this study, the perceived point of the experience seemed to structure learning. If the woman was doing something to achieve a pre-determined goal, then her learning was know-how she wanted to acquire to allow her to do it well. If her doing was experimenting to learn, then her performance didn't matter as much as what she learned. The more mistakes she made, theoretically the more she learned.

When some women were learning from experience, they submitted themselves to and immersed themselves in that experience. They did not feel defensive, helpless, or alienated. They opened not just their rational intellects but also their emotions, intuitions and inner voices, body and senses to the cues of the experience.

When many of the women were learning from experience, they used "trial and error". This is crucial, for despite the arguments that "lessons learned" through practice by others can be shared and hence shortcut continual reinventions of the wheel, these women seemed to feel a need to embody the "experience" for themselves by physically trying, observing results, checking, adjusting and retrying. This finding is echoed by the activities of women as relational learners reported by MacKeracher (1994): finding out, figuring out, testing out, and checking out. Trial-and-error learning as evidenced in this study seemed to work best within a webwork of support, among others who listened, supported, and validated that a woman wasn't expected to be an expert.

These women reflect on their workplace experience in complex ways

Organizational learning literature promotes verbalized, public reflection through workplace dialogue. However, the important reflections of most women in my study appeared to be intensely private meditations. The "in-action" parts of reflection (described by Schön, 1987) happen as fleeting notes to the meta-cognitive self. As one woman explained it, the minute she distanced herself from the action to enter the intellectually distanced state of observing and analysing her "self" in action, she lost the intuitive flow. To get back she had to relax and 'let go', like dropping into the world of a book during reading. Individuals can lose a sense of clock time and attachment to the material world and totally sublimate themselves to the sensual world demanded by the activity confronting them. This is where the important embodied learning happens. Reflection later is the sort of script-playing that scrutinizes, second-guesses, self-admonishes, self-supports, restories, but most of all asks, Why? and What did it mean?

Learning happens most through frequent reflective returns to experience, "talking through" a story to oneself or a listener till it begins to make sense. This re-visitation to an incident involves trying on different perspectives derived from new information, from the view upon the incident one achieves through the eyes of each new listener, from trying different ways of languaging the incident, from recalling different objects and moments of the incident, ascribing different interpretations to these, and configuring them into a whole understanding that shifts like the patterns in a kaleidoscope with each turn of the handle. Past insights and images that emerged through reflection are not lost but become absorbed into an enriching picture.

Naming: Inventing a language for experience through reflection

In some of this study's stories, learning any new area of workplace concepts or procedures began with learning its language: using established nomenclature to structure one's emerging understandings. In others, the workplace learning experience unfolded as a women gradually discerned what was happening inside and outside her, and constructed ways to describe this process: inventing a language to conjure something concrete out of amorphous tangles of thought. In still others, a woman came across an established language, embodying a conceptual structure, that named into consciousness those notions or practices she had already developed at a tacit level: finding other's words that made explicit what had been personally implicit.

All three of these linguistic acts -- using established nomenclature to learn unfamiliar concepts, inventing new language to structure new concepts, or finding expression through others' words -- demonstrate how powerfully language and learning is intertwined. Naming gives a sense of personal control, of demonstrating to oneself one's understanding of what one is doing or of what is happening, and why. Naming clarifies and thus tames the shadows of complex meanings. As these women came more and more to trust their intuition and other senses to both see and name their own experience, they became freed from others' authority, especially that exercised through dominant discourses. This appears to be a key dimension of workplace learning.

Critical thinking about the workplace world

In the workplace, many women engaged in critical reflection -- "why" questions, some intended to critically challenge and even change what was going on around them. Others were exercising their creativity, always stretching beyond what was, to reach into what lay beyond. Learnings that emanate from such questioning approaches in the workplace range from discovery (constructing new knowledge as one constructs a vision for future possibilities) to practical learnings about the protective hypocrisies of the workplace culture (how to "keep your mouth shut" to survive, or else commit "cultural suicide"), to disillusionment about the self.

The problem of reflective self-assessment: Critical second-guessing

Learning doesn't seem to happen as much through reflection on mistakes as it does from re-living the successes one has developed. One of the most debilitating activities women revealed was a habit they indulged in almost obsessively that they wished they could refrain from: second-guessing. Second guessing is returning to a personal performance to search it scrupulously for flaws -- rather than searching for successes to celebrate. Many of the women acknowledged a tendency towards "perfectionism" which they had learned was undermining their confidence and their effectiveness, as well as their learning. Many indicated that their own standards were often higher than the workplace norms. Some admitted to reflection on their workplace performance that was so critical that it became destructive self-admonishment.

Reflective dialogue

Dialogue was valued by women for support, being listened to, asking questions, comparing notes, or "lightening up". Relaxation helps get one unstuck or approach problems with sudden, fresh, intuitive grasps. Systematic reflection through talking or articulating perspectives was viewed as laboriously slow, inadequate for understanding, and often structured meanings artificially. Better avenues were listening to others' stories or watching other people in their own time and in their own language, much of it silent.

Learning to listen involved interrupting one's own agenda, flow of thought, or sense of productivity and becoming present to the other.

Dialogue that was facilitated, systematized, initiated by the organization, or otherwise artificial rather than flowing naturally from community activity was experienced to have minimal value as a time or place of learning in the workplace. But dialogue in formal education settings, such as night courses, often generated experiences that women identified as transformative learning.

Transformation is confirmed by critical reflection, not instigated by it

Critical reflection has become one of the more prominent concepts in the adult education literature of the past decade. Since the work of Brookfield (1987) and Mezirow (1990, 1991), both building on traditions of consciousness-raising which has a lengthy tradition in adult education dating from Paulo Freire, Myles Horton and other emancipatory educators, critical reflection has become understood as the most valuable tool for surfacing and identifying one's assumptions and belief structures, for the purpose of liberating adults from limiting or false meaning structures. Workplace educators (Argyris, 1993; Senge et al., 1994; Pierce, 1991) write about introducing dialogic methods of prompting critical reflection among workers to help create a more questioning workforce. The purpose of critical reflection, for proponents of continuous learning within a framework of human capital theory, is to promote habits of self-assessment among workers, to help "unfreeze" beliefs and personal theories of action that lead to undesirable results in the organization's eyes, to liberate people from standardized routines so they will be more innovative, and to make explicit tacit feelings and understandings that block productivity so that they can be dealt with.

The women in this study showed that while they often were well aware of gaps and limitations in the conditions around them, and while they sometimes assessed the quality of their performance to the point of debilitation, they did not often initiate self-critical reflection on their own assumptions and beliefs. Their learning, they believed, was incremental, unfolding gradually through many incidents, and mostly confirming what they already believed.

However, all of the women also were able to show significant ways in which their meaning perspectives had fundamentally shifted over the years of their work history -- in nuances of identity, attitudes to organizations and colleagues, work practices, conceptual beliefs, and ethical priorities. These changes seemed to have occurred subtly over long periods.

The women indicated they did not probe their own socio-political and cultural assumptions unless confronted by dramatically different perspectives that required them to accommodate, rather than dismiss these perspectives. Critical workplace incidents sometimes involved these confrontations of perspectives, but such experiences were often painful or otherwise traumatic and involved a long recursive process combining elements of healing, surviving, questioning, and various attempts at making sense. Somehow throughout this process a woman moved from accepting the new idea intellectually, to enfolding it into her existing knowledge (as different from simply allowing it to co-exist, inert, in her repertoire of understandings), and finally to integrating the idea into her self and her behavior. Positionality functions at various decision-points, many of them unconscious, throughout this transformational process: the choice to consider engaging intellectually in the new perspective, the choice to invite the new perspective into one's inner life or to keep it "out there", the choice to submit to the new meaning frame, letting go of existing meaning structures, and the choice to commit to the hard work and sacrifice of behavioral change. This process wove through other parts of a woman's life and her identity in this life, sometimes raising deep questions about life purpose, family, intimate relations, fitness, spirituality, and even culture.

When mired in the details of daily living it is difficult to see outside the shell of self as the main node. Subsequent reflection from a more distant vantage point provided by time attempted to make sense of the transformation, revealing and affirming as "right" and "natural" the change process that was difficult to discern during its living-through. Thus critical reflection functioned for many of these women as deep inner-examination, not to challenge and confront and deconstruct self, but to recognize and interpret the unfolding self, acknowledge the differences between the self now and then, and to affirm the changes as positive growth.

Significant change was apparently not induced in experiences of critical reflection where women's belief systems had been challenged by others through rational dialogue. These situations tended to produce defensive reactions, not reflective self-examination. The learning process in the workplace (often a very threatening atmosphere, with conflicting messages, constant scrutiny, assessment, and disciplinary regulations) is a weaving into the self and gradual extension of the self. Critical reflection, especially in the arena of public dialogue, requires the self to be vulnerable to a tearing apart which these women resisted in the high-stakes environment of the workplace.

Workplace Knowledge Most Valued by These Women

The individual's understanding of exactly what knowledge is most valuable will guide her attention, perception, interpretation, and memory of the situations in which she works. This conclusion emerged clearly in the section discussing the important role of women's intentions or purposes in constructing their learning. Throughout a learning process whose goal is behavioral change, where commitment and discipline are required beyond simple engagement with a new idea and intellectual agreement that "I want to be able to be/do that!", the individual's belief in the value of this knowledge will play a significant role in sustaining her through the hard work of learning and change.

Knowledge embraces remembered information, understandings and conceptual frameworks, skills, and attitudes. From the organizational focus, learning becomes defined according to competency that benefits the organization, according to what the organization values. Senge et al. (1994), whose work is currently being widely utilized by North American corporate and government organizations, promotes the value of the following knowledges among workers: systems thinking, skills in team work and dialogue, personal goal setting, group vision-making, and critical reflection to confront and change personal beliefs and assumptions. Watkins and Marsick (1993), whose corporate consulting credits indicate a similar influence among corporations, promote the value of similar knowledges: team learning processes, specifically oriented towards inquiry and honesty, and emphasizing critical reflection; collaborative work processes focused on innovating and sharing new knowledge; individual empowerment and collective vision; and individual continuous learning abilities. Both lists resonate in some way with the kinds of knowledges these women valued. There are, however, three characteristics of the women's knowledge that seem to create a problem when finding ways to integrate the organizational vision with the individual's: these women didn't seem to think in terms of creating new knowledge, like a commodity, to be shared; these women didn't often frame their knowledge in terms of problem-solving but in terms of people-understanding; over their careers, these women increasingly used self-understanding and self-development as the site for gathering insights and interpreting experiences.

There are various ways to approach the question, What knowledge did these women value as most worth learning in the workplace? Habermas's (1984) distinction of technical, communicative and emancipatory knowledges is a popular starting point for adult education theorists, partly because Mezirow's (1990) influential work on transformative learning builds on these three categories. Habermas's distinctions are so embedded by now in my own mind that I found myself, as I listened to the women's stories, unconsciously categorizing them. In doing so, I missed at first the important entanglement between technical and communicative knowledge for these women. Technical knowledge for many is embedded within their relationships, their way of thinking about self, and their essential meanings of the world. I also believed, early in the data analysis process, that I had identified an absence of "emancipatory" knowledge, when in fact I was distorting the women's own gentle sense of what it meant to grow free within the workplace because it didn't align with the critical theorists' understanding of consciousness-raising.

Different types of work knowledge have been identified in the literature by MacKeracher and McFarland (1993/94), who list the following work knowledges of women: technical, social, contextual, personal, and integrative. These are helpful when considering the overlappingness and embodiedness of all these knowledges, the individual's own sense of position respective to these knowledges, and their possible subordination to transcending allegiances that the individual holds. The next step for these researchers would be to show the relative importance of these knowledges to different individuals, the relationships between the knowledges, and the different processes of developing different knowledges.

When I asked the women in this study, "What knowledge do you value most?", they tended to name first the kinds of knowledge that were most valued in the workplace community with which they currently identified themselves. I found that only after interpreting their actual stories of learning, probing further to uncover all kinds of work situations that pertain to their learning, and speaking to them over a period of time as they watch themselves in action, was I able to uncover some of their most valued knowledge. What the women valued most to know determined what they attended to most and tried hardest to develop and keep learning, despite the organization's efforts to "teach" knowledges the organization valued, or to inculcate values serving the organization's mission. This is why the issue of the individual's knowledge value is so important in understanding her learning process.

Of the many themes related to knowledge value woven through this study, I have selected five of the most prominent to discuss in this section. The knowledge these women value depends on their positionality, their sense of agency as a knower, and on their sense of the purpose and ultimate end of knowledge. Their approach to the knowledge also varies: some want to understand deeply what is, others want to know why it is, still others want to know what if, and others, what can I do differently. Acknowledging these differences, the general themes of knowledge valued by women include knowledge of other people; knowledge of self and ways to express self in work; knowledge of what work-related purpose and activity towards that purpose are most worthwhile; knowledge of how to survive and grow in the workplace; and knowledge that will grant a sense of competence, position, and personal power in whatever workplace sphere is the woman's focus for her own work.

The women value knowledge of other people

This theme was one of the strongest throughout the women's stories of workplace learning. People-knowledge is correspondent to MacKeracher and McFarland's (1994) description of "social knowledge": "understanding the social conventions of the workplace, finding a place within the social network of co-workers, and coping with the authority relationships among workers and management" (p.55). In this study, women's most valued people knowledge fell into two areas: truly understanding other people and their perspectives more deeply and intuitively, and developing ways to connect with people more effectively. "Effective" is defined differently in different contexts by different individuals. But for many, an effective work relationship is harmonious, reasonably open, mutually trusting, allowing sharing of beliefs below the surface of courteous conversation rituals, balanced in status (even in assymetrical relations, those with greater formal status make subtle deferences to maintain equilibrium and a sense of just relations), and is characterized by a flow of communication both verbal and non-verbal that is mutually clear and reciprocally affirming for its participants.

This urge for communicative knowledge drives women to place high priority on listening over other work tasks and approaches to learning. They seek spaces and places for listening, and they focus on listening closely to understand the puzzles presenting themselves in other people's perspectives. Their stories of listening in order to appreciate diversity are threaded through with the struggles of discernment: the ambiguities and confusion of finding appropriate reference points, when one is seeking a more inclusive and integrative meaning perspective, to judge what the other believes and position oneself accordingly. They talked of their effort learning to put self aside and enter the other's world empathetically, curiously, courageously, and non-judgmentally. They talked of their struggles to find the patience to listen and be truly present to another within the press of multiple workplace demands. This focus on listening parallels in many ways the lengthy discussions of "inquiry" processes that Watkins and Marsick (1993) suggest are crucial to team learning. The only difference appears to be purpose: the women in this study listened to understand more deeply, not to innovate or produce, to deconstruct the other or to figure out how to communicate effectively with the other to get the job done or to learn together. In fact, women often struggled to reconcile listening and understanding with what they perceived to be the predominant workplace focus on action, competition, alienating technology, visible change and performance outcomes.

Many of the women also focused their learning on how to build a network of relationships to form a community. They valued their growing knowledge of others' needs and effective ways to communicate to meet these needs. In learning to make meaningful connections with other people, several women referred to their deepening sense of others' significance in their own work, not only appreciating that others have valuable knowledge and perspectives, but also coming to understand their central purpose as *servant* to others. They also had to learn whom not to trust, whose working style was destructive to their self, whose knowledge or ways of practice was not worthy of attending to or learning from, who was fraudulent, whose ulterior motives were dangerous. This is a difficult positionality issue, for these people sometimes have formal or informal status in the workplace community. Discerning how exactly to position oneself (in crudest terms, as "closed" or "open" to learning from this person) is often a private struggle, and its conclusion must sometimes be hidden under rituals of social relations that preserve an appearance of harmony.

When women listed those skills or understandings they would like to develop in themselves, invariably listening was mentioned. One noted that she found it interesting that she named something she already does reasonably well, rather than something she knows nothing about but is curious in. Many of these women do appear to consolidate their sense of what they know with who they are, and seek to further develop this foundation rather than disrupt it by introducing very different knowledges.

The women value knowledge of what they consider to be their authentic self, and ways to integrate this self in the workplace.

Above any other knowledge, most women in this study appeared to value their movement towards deeper, more integrative, discriminating, and inclusive understandings of self. Some noted that this orientation in their learning came later in their career, and felt like a natural progression from learning the competencies needed to survive, to broadening their influence and stretching their scope, to integrating their self. Erikson's (1982) theory of adult ego development, while deserving critique on many dimensions, identifies a "generativity" and "ego integrity" stage in the middle and late years that echoes somewhat with some of these women's sense of development. Studies linking women's development with their roles in the workplace also show a period of reflection and integration (Clark, Caffarella, and Ingram, 1994) that is apparent in the work lives of some women in this study.

What is meant by the "development of self" is usually breadth and depth of awareness and self-expression in the world, moral integrity of thought and action, and an unfolding of all the self's capacities and putting them to service. Work activity helped these women appreciate the special distinctions of their self: who is this unique person that is me and how do others see me? what am I good at doing? what work do I like most? where is my power? what is my purpose? Most of all, these women seemed to seek and value knowledge that led to inner peace, wisdom, and a still point of centeredness -- what some were convinced was their "authentic" self -- in the workplace.

They suggested that coming-to-know self through work is incremental and recursive, not transformative. The most valued learnings about self through work are learning to trust the inner voice, to rely on intuition, and to name knowledge one constructs. Finding a stable core in a destabilized workworld appears to be a central motive for coming-to-know self. They resisted the forces of urgency, superficiality and fragmentation in the workplace. The women learned to protect self by deliberately naming boundaries and discerning the margins that define their self as separate from the community.

The other most valued strand of self-knowledge learned in the workplace that women indicated was developing the moral courage and justification to express this "authentic" self. This expression moved many women closer to the integration of their inner and outer selves but often placed them in value conflicts that resulted in leaving a job.

The women value knowledge of what work purpose and activity towards that purpose is most worthwhile

As part of the developing knowledge and assertion of self, and as they developed more control over allocating their time and energy, women often confronted a complex issue: Just what is most worth doing? This existential issue penetrates to the heart of individual understandings of one's purpose within the broader social and natural world; of one's ethics and vision for the world one delineates for oneself. Although only one woman named this issue as a significant pursuit of knowledge for her, others indicated by the amount of talk preoccupied with this issue that they shared a focus on learning their work purpose in life.

A related learning that many valued was the knowledge of multiple perspectives or visions of what is most worth doing, and the ongoing struggle to discern just whose vision carries more merit, and what criteria finally can be justly used to adjudicate differing ideals. Some valued learning about evolving visions. A vision for change generates directives for work activity and criteria by which to evaluate this activity, from which flow new paths and sources for learning. Thus when a vision gradually evolves to transform its contours into something unanticipated, one needs to learn how to be ready to transform criteria for quality work, directions for purposeful learning, and definitions of what constitutes worthwhile directions for personal energy. This knowledge of how to live through one's work according to emergent visions includes the skills of observing closely, naming and interpreting what really happens in the process (which is often different from what one expects to happen), and adjusting purposes accordingly.

For many, developing and finding ways to express a spiritual self in and through work was essential knowledge. This entailed different issues for different women. For some, a spiritual struggle involves reconciling virtues of sacrifice and the submission of self to a divine will, in a culture structured by material pursuits, self-interest, and a humanist focus on self-determination. Some found their most startling learning in the workplace to be related to exploring their spirituality, such as finding out the extent of their personal influence on others and the possibilities of power that flow from prayerful work. Most accepted the need to be cautious and selective about explicit reference to their spirituality in the workplace, despite their growing awareness of their spiritual longings and power becoming integrated with their approaches to work.

The women value knowledge of how to survive and grow in the workplace

This area corresponds lightly to Macheracher and McFarland's (1994) "contextual knowledge." Naturally women had to learn how to function appropriately in different workplace cultures, but this sort of knowledge was rarely mentioned. Most had developed strategies early in their work histories to "case out" a new workplace, learn "who's who in the zoo", "how things are done around here", and where there is flexibility and tolerance for change. More difficult, apparently, was learning particular lessons that were crucial in order to protect one's authentic self whose idealism and innocence in the workplace could lead it into destructive situations, and to actively create a space for the self to grow.

Learning to compromise one's dreams with the organization's constraints and different values was a lesson that women learned in various ways. For some, this involved disillusion: Kirsten learned to expect that "nothing ever happens" with projects in a conservative bureaucracy. For others, these were necessary lessons in letting go of personal desires to meld with a collective vision. Janis learned to "kill the babies" in film-making: the reality is that those things an individual treasures tenderly may be unnecessary, and require removal from the final product. Many mentioned learning over the years not to openly commit so much of themselves in hard work towards the organization's purposes, because this effort is rarely acknowledged or valued. Women translated this learning into action by becoming cautious about too quickly subjugating their dreams into the workplace, by withdrawing their allegiance to the organization, or more commonly, by diverting their dreams and the energy they pour into them into their own projects.

The women in this study all shared an important characteristic: resilience. Whether this was a quality developed through the experience of many workplace changes or whether they were able to adapt to and enjoy change because of their inherent resilience was impossible for me to discern. The knowledge related to resilience they claimed to value was their ability and willingness to learn. All shared a belief that "I can learn anything!" All had developed a sense of the resources available to them in the workplace, and an ability to trust others' value as resources. All had experiences that created a firm belief that even the most unfamiliar, ambiguous, or apparently complicated area could be entered and eventually understood.

Related to this knowledge of how to learn brand new understandings and skills, women valued their knowledge of how to "see" the world in front of them and name it. Their developing powers of discernment ranged from understanding embedded meanings in people's communication and underlying structures in organizational culture and ideology, to developing an ability to see what was in front of their noses, including their own processes of thinking and learning and communicating, and to inventing a language to express this. So for instance, Liz found herself discerning and describing the actual parts of a training needs assessment process in ways that completely contradicted the formal models for understanding this process. Along with this freedom from others' authoritative claim to legitimate framing of the workworld, came a growing sense of personal power in naming the process.

Women learned about power and how it unfolded asymmetrically in workplaces along lines of formal status, class, race, age, gender, formal education, and simple audacity. Marilyn was caught in a dialectical learning process as she moved from a truly collaborative, trusting, sharing approach to people and organizations, to a sudden awareness of the power struggles and naked forces of domination functioning underneath people's rhetoric of openness, continuous learning and democracy. Women learned to accept and sometimes laugh at the territorial struggles, the illusions, shallowness, hidden threats, and other power dynamics going on around them. Few saw themselves as players enmeshed within these power dynamics. The response, in terms of action to protect the authentic self in light of knowledge about "how things *really* run around here", is often to "pay lip service" to the dominant ideology and to carry on with one's own projects of meaningful work and learning. Those women who told stories of open resistance to the power structures were typically very bitter about the consequences of their actions. Catherine viewed her actions of refusing to support the status quo by questioning the dominant ideological and regulatory frameworks as "committing cultural suicide".

The women value knowledge that will grant a sense of competence, position, and personal power in their workplaces

The women indicated that in any new job they sought to develop competency accountable to very high personal standards. Most claimed they were very practical in their orientations to knowledge. Motivation to learn emanated from the task confronting them. They didn't plan "what I need to learn to get ahead" or what skills in my repertoire do I need to compete or be valuable. Rather, they developed the knowledge they needed to cope with situations in the here-and-now: how to understand what this supervisor, who communicates very indirectly wants me to do; how to figure out the software to run that budget task; how to finish this project in only 24 hours. They tended to be rigorous self-assessors and remembered indulging in this habit since they began working.

Over time in their work histories, the women learned to be patient with themselves in new situations and to acknowledge that novices need not pretend to be masters. They learned to allot time for this learning process and to be comfortable with the various uncomfortable phases of developing new expertise. They seemed to develop what Jarvis (1992) terms "practical" knowledge -- the "technical" or "instrumental" skills of their expertise -- through actual trial and error in a wide variety of contexts, taking initiative and relying on people and other resources. This process has been well documented by other researchers (see for instance Elbaz (1992) on teacher knowledge; Benner (1984) on nursing knowledge; Schön (1983) on architects' knowledge; and Fox, Maxmanian and Putnam (1989) on physicians' knowledge). When asked to describe their learning, they rarely describe instances recalling their process of developing this practical knowledge. Instead, they tended to narrate moments of jubilant celebration when they met and overcame a particular challenge using their practical knowledge but also drawing forth other previously unknown capabilities. Their technical-communicative expertise, evident in their daily performance of practical skills and making myriads of choices using what Cervero (1992) terms "wise judgment", became taken-for-granted and so closely enfolded into the self that it was almost invisible to them.

When asked to describe their own skills or procedural knowledge, women tended to name their qualities and values as these have developed over time through their work and other spheres of their lives: empathy, honesty, caring, justice, curiosity, intuition, creativity, courage, persistence, resourcefulness, discipline, patience, and passion. They seemed not to think of accumulating skills in an additive way, but of developing their ways of thinking about their world and their self.

This orientation is slightly askew of predominant notions that skills and knowledge are "portable", "transferable", quantifiable and commodifiable. According to writers promoting learning organizations, knowledge can be developed by teams and shared and stored as if it were "intellectual capital" (Stewart, 1994). But in projects or other work assignments where such knowledge would naturally develop, these women claimed they didn't take with them instrumental or conceptual knowledge that could be applied again when the project was over. Instead, the practical knowledge was very fluid, something to be moved *through* (or that moves through a person) and almost forgotten afterwards, rather than absorbed *into* the self and kept safe. "Use it or lose it" many of them were fond of saying. There also was a clear preference for moving on to explore new territory and "trying your hand" at new ways of doing things, rather than consolidating and perfecting and re-applying knowledge already encountered.

What stayed with many of the women, or what they identified as the knowledge they valued learning in the various practical endeavors of their work, was self-awareness and self-confidence, deepening values and integration of these values with work, the stimulation of their thinking by exposure to new perspectives and experiences, and broadening perspectives that holistically integrated rationality, emotion, psyche, spirituality, relations with others, and intuition. These happened to be the six parts of self involved in learning identified by Griffin (1987).

The women often didn't view learning as knowledge that they took with them from project to project or job to job. They also didn't necessarily view learning as something they "needed" and sought. They sought stimulation, passion, a sense of belonging to something worthwhile, and the learning seemed to happen as a result of their participation.

Technology was not granted any special place in women's discussion of their practical learning. They did not appear to ascribe special power or domination to technology, and they resisted what they perceived to be the urgent messages surrounding them to master technology. Some were using computer systems and Internet as a regular part of their work and spoke candidly of the limitations of electronic communications. Two were experimenting with different ways of learning to use software programs they had identified as helpful for their own work. Another had decided that other people were much more comfortable with computer graphics than she and decided to rely on their expertise rather than developing it for herself. One was struggling to persuade upper management in her large corporation to incorporate some of the technology she had decided was necessary to improve their operational processes. In other words, learning to use technology held no mystique for these women. They approached it as they seemed to approach other new tools, resources, and assignments they encountered in their work: systematically, creatively, confidently, with an air of excitement and enthusiasm, and always placing themselves in control of the knowledge.

Workplace Conditions That Enhance the Women's Learning

Organizational learning literature has become prescriptively detailed about ways to enhance continuous learning in the workplace. Indeed, this is the project of human resource educators and organizational developers like Dixon (1993), Argyris (1993), the Innovation Associates group (Senge et al., 1994), and Marsick and Watkins (1993). The organization itself is charged with the project to "sculpt" itself into a community of continuous learners happily innovating and dialoguing. Initiatives to be taken by organizations, presumably management, suggested by the literature include the following:

1. Put value on learning by supporting continuing education in various forms among staff;

2. Put value on experimentation by rewarding cautious risk-taking and refraining from penalizing mistakes;

3. Build critical reflection into the organization's daily operations through active measures: teach employees how to question their own belief systems and the organization's operations, facilitate employee's critical confrontation of their own and others' assumptions, teach employees the habit of continuous self-assessment and correction.

4. Build team learning skills: teach people how to work collaboratively in teams, promote verbal "inquiry and dialogue" (Senge et al, 1994; Dixon, 1993), and reward team effort.

5. Build "action-reflection" projects (Watkins and Marsick, 1993) in which new knowledge is deliberately generated, shared, and stored for the organization, and participants are taught how to critically deconstruct their personal belief systems and assumptions.

6. Build a collective vision among employees which uses a systems worldview, reifies the organization's existence, sublimates the employees' spiritual longings and personal dreams (see for instance Senge et al., 1994, which describe "personal mastery" activities for employees, facilitated by organizations, in deep personal examination of longings) into a purpose for the organization, and propagates an ideology of learning towards creating knowledge for the organization's competitive advantage.

Critical theorists (see for example Cunningham, 1993; Hart, 1993; Noble, 1990) would raise issue with this list for its reproduction of dominant class and economic structures which are invisible from the "systems" perspective, its continuing subordination of workers' lives to management purposes and reified marketplace imperatives, and its neglect of interpersonal and organization-wide power dynamics which operate to subvert dialogue, inquiry, and critical reflection in dis-empowering ways (for critical challenges to empowerment through dialogue, see Ellsworth, 1992; Gore, 1992).

But leaving aside the debates generated by differences between the critical and the human capital philosophical perspectives, one key problem in this list from an adult education perspective is its assumption that learning must be externally motivated, facilitated, and manipulated through top-down interventions. People are assumed to be passive, requiring someone else to turn on their power switches. But I have argued in this study that, even conceding that certain personal beliefs and values are determined by socio-cultural shared meanings of the various organizations through which the individual moves, a person also exercises significant agency in directing and shaping meanings. Her on-going learning is largely influenced by her own personal intentions and her positionality to various disjuncturing experiences, which this study has found to be more grounded in the inner world of self than the outer world of the organization's ideology and sign-signifier systems. Yet this essential agency in workplace learning has been minimized by the approach taken in the learning organization literature.

But to critique as completely dehumanizing and ultimately debilitating the "human resource" approach to learning taken by organizations is to deny the important developmental potential that many women ascribed to their work. Liz and Carla in particular had each spent a life working for a large corporation in which they both freely acknowledged the existence of political struggles, bureaucratic structures, and discrepancies between official discourse and personal meanings. Yet both were effusive in their loyalty to an organization which they claimed gave them work challenges and positive working conditions that grounded their lives and identities, developed their creativity and personal resources, gave them continuous personal and professional support over the years, and encouraged them to grow. To claim that these women were co-opted and thus incapable of independent consciousness of the real oppression which they endured is absurd. Such a critical posture denies that any human can be truly free to understand the truth of her own situation without assistance from an emancipatory educator.

The developmental potential of a workplace, according to these women's stories of learning, lies less in management interventions of training and incentives and more in the nature of the work itself and the elusive qualities of a supportive community with different perspectives. Work itself is one of the most legitimate pursuits of adulthood and thus highly motivational for learning, as women discovered when they were not confronted by work challenges -- learning oriented towards leisure did not offer the essential excitement and commitment inspired by work learning. Fulfilling, challenging work extending one's influence into a community can create a sense of power, an engagement of passion in learning, and a stimulus unleashing creativity on a compelling object.

External rewards, verbal or material, were never mentioned by this study's participants as helpful in motivating their learning or creating workplace conditions favorable to learning. Training compelled by an organization was often named as a barrier, not an enhancer of learning. "Learning organization" initiatives complete with team initiatives and emphasis on critical reflection were experienced by four of the participants, but generally dismissed in terms of influence upon their own learning. Support for professional development opportunities, giving women the choice and control over their own formal continuing education was valued by most women, but was considered supplementary to, not essential in their on-going workplace learning. The key enhancers were freedom and growth opportunities in their work. Specifically, six conditions of work or the workplace community emerged as crucial to ensure these women's continuous learning and development in the workplace:

1. Incentive and opportunity to make a difference through meaningful work.

2. Continuous challenge through newness: new projects, new task assignments, working with new people, new dilemmas to figure out, new ideas to chase, new visions to pursue and make concrete.

3. Freedom and opportunity to create, to make choices and try out ideas. Often this opportunity is a project whose end is concrete and worthwhile enough to justify the submission and expenditure of personal energy.

4. Being surrounded by an informal closely-connected group who share and support each other.

5. Opportunities to teach or help others to learn.

6. A compelling and immediate role model, like a collegial supervisor, who is oriented to clear purposes, takes risks, likes to learn and change, and approaches work enthusiastically.

Each of these points will be discussed in fuller detail in the paragraphs below.

Incentive and opportunity to make a difference through meaningful work

As illustrated in the chapter arguing the importance of women's intentions in work and learning, the women in this study were searching in their work for a motive and opportunity to contribute to their world through action they valued as worthwhile. Meaningful work for these women above all seemed oriented towards serving others and accomplishing change that they wanted to bring about in their world. Their visions for change embodied what are often referred to as "common good" values (Lange Christenson, 1996): helping others to achieve psychological and physical freedom, a richer and more abundant life, peace, justice, and personal fulfillment.

When women felt their efforts being compelled by meaningful work, they generally submitted to the demands and challenges of the work. They "gave 100%" of self, time, and energy; they tended to approach the work with an open "learning" stance and let go of the self-protective positioning that can prevent transformation or even curiosity and the creative construction of new knowledge.

Most importantly, women searched for and found themselves learning the most when their work became a source or focal point for integration of various other parts of their identities and life tasks, including, for different women, mothering, creativity, spiritual searches for meaning, community outreach, the urge to lead, the urge to expand and control, and the need for what Brookfield (1987) calls "significant personal relationships".

Continuous challenge through newness

More than anything, the women's stories of the workplace emphasized how much they wanted to keep engaging in what they thought of as learning experiences. When work continually presented challenge, women said they learned. When challenge stopped, women said that their "will to know" that propelled the urge to learn dried up. Work challenges seemed to present the most legitimate incentive and focus for learning for women whose daily time was mostly spent in the workplace, and thus whose identity was closely bound to their work. When workplace conditions became "boring" through over-familiarity, overly regulated or overly repetitive tasks, women either became depressed or desperately sought a new fountain of learning "outside" work: new projects, new task assignments, opportunities to work with new people who offered new perspectives and questions, new messy dilemmas to figure out, new ideas to chase, new visions to pursue and make concrete.

This search for "newness" is not simply a taste for diversion. Many of the women expressed a powerful need for challenge and intensity of engagement in their work: they wanted passion . They asked, What else is there? What lies beyond? Women used strong imagery to describe their condition in a job without forward-moving challenge: "I become depressed and more and more lethargic, until I get desperate;" "If I don't have change, I wither and die." They welcomed assignments that enlarged their awareness and expressed new capacities of self. They "stretched" responsibilities: What other ways can I do this? Without new challenges to exercise and expand their developing understandings, the women became "thirsty for something new to learn," often leaving a job or diverting their creative energies to projects outside the workplace of their employment.

Projects towards a meaningful end that offer freedom and opportunity to be creative

Most stories of critical learning experiences in the workplace were rooted in what many of the women referred to as "projects": time-bounded activity focused towards a particular purpose, intended to produce one or more identifiable concrete outcomes that in the participants' view were worthwhile. A work project purpose, more than projects emanating in leisure pursuits or in formal learning endeavors external to work, justifies the mobilization of personal resources. Thus a project provides an important impetus for learning, for striking out in a new direction that requires risk and energy. Without the external impetus some of the women carved out their own projects at work, some sought work outside their "day job" to provide the stimulation they sought, while others grew lethargic and "stagnant" waiting for a project assignment.

Usually a network of people, synchronously or asychronously, became involved in a project, creating a whole which could transcend a woman's own self-imposed limitations of identity and personal capacity. This network often brought a woman into contact with people and perspectives she had not met before. They were united by a similar purpose and pressed to interactive communication by the material demands of production and the pull of a bounded timeframe. Time pressure often functioned in a positive way if the project participant felt confident in the instrumental and communicative capability of the group: even timelines that seemed unreasonably short often created an atmosphere of excitement. The momentum of the project group seemed to draw out a woman's individuality in ways that were often surprising to her; she looked back to admire the abilities and resources and personality she found herself exercising in the process.

The most positively remembered projects were those that offered freedom and opportunity to create, to make choices and try out ideas. The women who talked about work projects said that they felt excited and alive and learned most when caught in a project that unleashed their creative energy. Play and playfulness often characterized group activity in projects where participants felt both rapport and freedom to innovate. In particular, the women sought a large degree of personal freedom to plan their own activity and directions in the projects; some typically sought to direct most of the entire project activity themselves, while others usually carved out an area of activity within a group's project territory that they "owned" and directed. The substance of a "meaningful project" in work varied for different women, but most often was characterized by one or more of the following dimensions:

1. The project aims to provide service to people in a way that meets what the woman understands to be a real human need.

2. The project activities will guide the woman to explore areas of knowledge and action new to her.

3. The project allows her freedom to develop networks of people naturally and emergently as required at various stages of the project. The project gives her authority and freedom of time as she requires to develop authentic communicative reciprocal connections within these networks.

4. The outcome of the project is not foreseeable but emerges partly according to the choices the woman makes, the creativity she exercises, and the possibilities she uncovers and maximizes during the process of the project.

5. The project finishes in some kind of concrete outcome that the woman perceives to be valuable, linked to an overall objective that she believes to be significant in the world.

Such projects were frequently cited as presenting steep, exciting challenges that demanded learning. Projects developed a momentum of energy that motivated the women's commitment and effort to unexpected levels. The women were often surprised in observing certain personal capacities that they didn't formerly recognize being unleashed and expressed in a project. What they valued when the project ended was their invigorated spirit, newly created or strengthened relationships, and discovery of self. The material or productive knowledge constructed during the project (i.e., that could be transferred to another endeavor) was not as valued. The thrill of the chase was what they sought, not the capture of the content.

Supportive community where information flows and relationships are carefully tended

The women's stories of intensive workplace learning almost always were located within what they described as a supportive community environment. They learned somewhat from the community members and the community knowledge, but mostly the women seemed to value the community's support and feedback for their own continuing trial-and-error of practice. Different women appreciate different degrees of "support", but the following qualities characterize what most women acknowledged to be an engaging workplace community.

Information and shared meanings flow freely in the community. People share thoughts and feelings openly. Communication flows not necessarily through rational dialogue focused on the task at hand but also through touching, joking, gifting (of many dimensions, including time and resources), story-telling, personal inquiries ('How is your mother doing?'). Interruptions of meaning or meaning conflicts (such as subtle interpersonal "issues") are immediately acknowledged, inscribed with significance, and gently coaxed into the open arena of speech to figure them out. New group members are inducted into the group's language, and rejected when they fail to fit.

Energy and identity characterize the community. The identity of the group is often created by positioning itself against the status quo as unique, maverick, and creative -- thrusting forward, "striking out" to innovate, not maintaining or safeguarding "what is". Energy emanates most often from a group sense of purpose (especially a flexible and concrete vision) for change that all members commit to as meaningful and important. Energy generates the group's "can-do" orientation towards this purpose, whose momentum incites the courage and confidence of any individual participant. The group's commitment to shared purpose and identity has a liveliness of spirit that buoys and propels the group's action forward. The group's energy is dissipated when there is no newness, either a new project engaging individuals' creative energy, a new opponent to battle or compete with, or new members bringing fresh perspectives. The energy is also dissipated by external controls: top-down limits to the group's autonomy, impenetrable or subversive blocks deliberately placed to inhibit the group's completion of a project. When the energy dissipates, a woman frequently chooses to leave the community.

Informal bonds form and hold together the community, not systematic group procedures and certainly not top-down policy. A good example is Nancy's story of the systematic meetings that were imposed on and almost ruined the closely-bonded nursing unit, in an attempt to formalize the practice-share dialogue sessions that unfolded informally in everyday practice. Another example is Elizabeth's story of the exciting "continuous learning" vision that became strangled in the bleak human resources policies dictating systematic competency-sequence plans.

Informal bonds and leadership are not incongruous. Sometimes the community has clear consistent recognizable leadership, and sometimes different group members take informal leadership roles in different circumstances. The key seems not to be the clear presence or absence of a leader with vision, but the congruence of leadership with the structure of the group. Where the community is structured hierarchically, group members look for explicit and consistent exercise of power, visioning, and standard-setting by the leader. Where the community is more egalitarian in structure, formal leaders are allotted roles that have little influence in the day-to-day functioning of the community.

Individuals feel a sense of ethical, ideological, cultural and practical fit with the community. They sense congruence between the community and their own worldview and moral vision. The external world created by the community's actions and language reflects the aspirations stirring in the individual's internal world for purpose and self-image. When a fit can't be felt or when a fit becomes attenuated through change in the community or individual, she usually opts either to leave (seeking fit in another community), or to resist through confrontational opposition or taking action to change the community. If she enters a phase of passive resistance or psychological withdrawal from the community's purpose and activity, this is usually a temporary respite to think and make choices.

The community is not usually self-critical. Instead of seeking transformation and a more inclusive, integrating meaning structure through critical reflection on its own activity, the group seems to seek to strengthen and affirm existing meanings. These essential beliefs and values ground any new knowledge constructed by the group.

Talk is important to forming close learning-working relationship but listening is more valued, according to these women. Most seek to bond, connect with people, to understand and make meaning from what they hear. They struggle to develop an ability to listen without imposing personal meanings, to listen without seeking confirmation of familiar perspectives but to integrate new ones. Yet the women listen to what they want to -- and interpret what they hear according to existing frameworks of meaning. Rarely did a woman tell a story of listening to another person talk in work activity in such a way or about such ideas that the woman found herself questioning her own assumptions. Challenges to meaning perspectives and eventual transformation of these perspectives usually were recognized by women to be generated by dialogue in formal learning situations, or over long periods of time and workplace activity.

When she started teaching at the college, Zoe was struck by the dedication to staff development . After the isolation of the law firm, this environment was luxurious: lots of informal talk among colleagues about strategy, plentiful and accessible seminars in staff development, encouragement to try new techniques and rewards for success, time to prepare and think, and most of all a general atmosphere of positive, upbeat people enthusiastic about their work. Nancy's warm memories of the community health clinic shared many of these characteristics. Staff nurses were relatively autonomous. Each had close contact with her own clients, they could make decisions and try creative new programs without bureaucratic regulation or surveillance, but they had constant access to one another's human presence and judgment. In describing the features of a work environment which genuinely fostered her continuous learning, Wendy noted the playful camaraderie of the social service agency staff, their helpfulness and support which encouraged her to risk trying new activities. She also credited the agency's plentiful free staff training seminars that taught her the skills she needed to try these activities. Janis's stories of positive filming experiences were stories of people in tight creative relationships, all propelled by a vision of a creative product that has a compelling purpose. But Zoe left the college after a few years, in search of different opportunities. Janis goes from project to project, adapting to or pulling together a different workteam for each one, always in search of something new. Wendy left the agency because she realized she was "just tired to it", and wanted something more.

Opportunities to teach or help others

The impetus to learn and the focus for attention and perception that determines what a woman learns appears often to be rooted in an act of teaching or helping another person. Almost all of the women in this study sought close contact with clients, people who have needs that these women feel called to serve and properly skilled to assist. The almost compulsive urge "to help" is such a ubiquitous theme in their work histories that for some, the "I'm here to help you" instinct is invisible and certainly uncritically accepted. For others, their consciousness of the domination-dependency cycles set in place by their "helping" an "other" are continuing cause for distress and confusion.

The servanthood metaphor is strong for most. For these women, t common obstacles to fulfilling their project of serving human beings with real needs are key sources of frustration which can influence the flow of their learning in different ways. First, interference from organizational constraints in the form of policies and procedures that divert resources from the people the women feel need help, and controls limiting the scope and freedom of the women's working activity, often prevent the women from helping. The women's learning generated by these conditions of organizational constraint is varied: she may develop a critical consciousness which may lead to her eventual separation from the organization; she may develop subversive strategies to achieve what she decides is best while appearing to satisfy the organization's demands; or she may develop a critical voice of opposition which she uses to openly confront and question the organization's operations.

Second, the clients themselves respond to or resist external "help" in complex and varied ways that generate much of the women's most significant learning. The women mull over incidents repeatedly to make sense of a situation where obviously the other's perspective and interpretations of the relation are very different from their own. They experiment with different approaches, sometimes with an on-the-spot unconsciousness that they only realize in later reflection. In each situation of conflict between their intentions and expectations of how things should unfold with the client, and what actually does occur, the women are often forced to make a judgment that will determine what and how they learn from the incident: Am I wrong here? Am I at fault? Am I blind to something important? Or is the other the one who needs to change to conform to my expectations? This is the essential choice of positionality that configures all human workplace relations, activity, and the knowledge that is reproduced or constructed within them.

Many spoke of the opportunity to teach other adults as a key source of learning. Three of the many complex sources of learning through teaching will be discussed here: presentation of what Clandinin and Connelly (1991) call one's "personal, practical knowledge", preparation for teaching, and reflection on teaching experience.

Presentation of the knowledge one has acquired through the trial-and-error of workplace practice, whether through explanation or demonstration, is a process of acknowledging, owning, and transforming that knowledge. Explanation to another involves not only the languaging process of making explicit and rational all kinds of tacit embodied knowledge embedded in one's practice, but also making public this knowledge and oneself as its author. For many, this seems to be a significant step in growth of work knowledge: finding the confidence to declare one's own choices, inventions of skill and procedures as legitimate knowledge worthy of imparting to another.

Preparation for teaching, which involves not only pre-instructional curriculum development processes but also continuous reflection to make pedagogical choices based on feedback from the learner, is a steep slope of learning for most. Many teachers might agree that three processes seem to be involved in preparation: the selection and organization of one's holistic knowledge into formal structures, the positioning of knowledge which formerly has been entirely personal against this new imperative of the learner's needs, and the surprises of continuous dilemmas that unfold the minute the learner begins to interact with this knowledge and the teacher's intentions. These three processes help clarify workplace knowledge. Gaps and ambiguities in the teacher's knowledge become explicit. Unresolved contradictions, conflicts between practical knowledge and certain formal structures, as well as unusually innovative ideas and key questions often emerge during preparation.

Reflection on teaching experience makes conscious the image of self in a position of power. The actual act of teaching is energizing for many and multi-layered, drawing forth complex thinking and multiple simultaneous decisions that are amazing to recall in reflection. There are immediate concrete outcomes for every one of the teacher's actions, outcomes which are often difficult to interpret and raise dilemmas of role and meanings and strategies. Another theme occupying reflection includes essential questions about learning: what is the learning process? how is my own process of learning different from this person's? what should be the content and outcomes of learning? who should determine the learning agenda? how do we know when learning has occurred?

Thus learning through reflection on teaching is a powerful affirmation and awareness of the self as powerful and capable on the one hand, and a rich source of understanding about learning itself on the other. Through teaching adults, people often gain a sense of personal stability and competence. They are forced to identify clear reference points of standards and meanings for their work practice, and to make these explicit to others. They find themselves developing a language to help name parts of their knowledge. Perhaps most powerful of all, many of the women had experienced the sense of personal efficacy and the satisfaction of fulfilling their need to serve others by actually observing others developing awareness and competency as a direct result of their teaching intervention.

Strong models exemplifying ideals of practice the work-learner aspires to embody

Many of the women enjoyed informal "apprenticeships" marked by multi-varied experiences and task challenges. Where there were role models, these apprenticeships were remembered as exciting learning periods. In particular, many of the women most vividly remembered and felt they were most influenced by a person in a supervisory capacity with whom they had immediate and often frequent contact, who was oriented to clear purposes, took risks, liked to learn and change, and approached work enthusiastically. Of the few women who did not enjoy connection with role models they respected, apprenticeship was remembered as a horrendous experience: frightening, confusing, even humiliating. Some longed for real-life role models of the kinds of behaviors and ways of practicing that they aspired to achieve themselves, even late in their work-lives.

Role modeling has been well-established as a powerful mode of workplace learning. People choose role models according to who they admire, connect with, and see enough parallels with their own beliefs, style of working and capabilities that they can imagine themselves imitating the model. The stories of women in this study underscored three dimensions in particular of role modeling.

First, role models that shaped women's way of thinking about themselves and their practice tended to be most significant in younger stages of work life. Women vividly remembered the indelible influence exercised upon their work values, style of performance, and expectations of "how things should be done" in the workplace by a particular superordinate in the years they would term their "apprenticeship". Vivid and warm memories of role models seem to be confined to their twenties and early thirties. Beyond these years, even for women new to a career or entering a workplace for the first time in later years of adulthood, the reference point for learning seems to shift to the self: intuitions, personal values, and self-constructed meanings of others' actions.

For many of the women in this study the most influential role models, whose ways of practice and value systems were absorbed by the neophyte and maintained through later career years, were older women. These role models often exuded standards of practice based on such values as honesty, hard work, loyalty to the organization, concern for detail, importance of relationship building and evergreening. More rarely models demonstrated critical questioning and assertive action to get resources or implement an innovation.

Second, the process of learning from a role model seemed not so much to be affected by active teaching or mentoring by the model, as by the power of the model's presence in action. The young learner began to embody the model's knowledge, and found herself even years later able to imaginatively conjure the spirit of the model's presence: How would her model handle this dilemma? Mentoring with dialogue and the model's explicit coaching, sometimes figured into the "apprenticeship", but usually the most valued models were those who listened to, not talked at, the learner. The most important learning, according to these women, was watching the model *in situ* performing multi-layered skills within the organization's shifting structures and cultural norms, while presenting an integrated way of being that appealed to the learner.

Third, the role model was invariably not only someone the young learner respected (usually admiring the results the model achieved), but more importantly someone who patiently took time to care for and form a close connection with the new recruit. In response to this connection, the young learner opened herself to internalize the values and beliefs governing the choices and behavior of the model.

The six workplace conditions outlined in this section appeared to create environment and activity where the women's most valued learning blossomed. An opportunity to make a difference through meaningful work, continuous challenge through newness, freedom and opportunity to create, an informal closely-connected group who share and support each other, opportunities to teach or help others to learn, and a compelling role model in early career all emerged in women's stories of learning that developed self-awareness, expanded their abilities, and sparked their personal power.

Barriers to the Women's Workplace Learning

What is a "barrier" to learning? Watkins and Marsick (1993) outline six "barriers to change" in sculpting a learning organization: truncated learning (an interrupted or cosmetic implementation); learned helplessness (from meeting resistance); tunnel vision (inability to see things from a systems perspective); growing numbers of temporary, part-time and overtaxed workers; changing loyalties (people who leave); and the paradox of fear and entitlement (people doing anything for fear of losing their jobs and people who believe the organization owes them a living). Some of these apply to individuals' continuous learning but most are stated from the organization's perspective: obstacles presented by people that prevent the organization's transformation. Synthesizing ideas stated in various forms by advocates for learning organizations such as Watkins and Marsick (1993), Senge et al. (1994), and Dixon (1993), a list of barriers presented by the workplace organization preventing individuals' continuous learning typically would include:

1. the pressure of doing which allows little time for reflection,

2. a reward system which promotes excellent predictable performance rather than experimentation and risk,

3. lack of opportunity for workers to attempt new tasks or work with new groups of people,

4. insufficient value placed on continuing development and skill-building in the organization,

5. a competitive culture that encourages people to cover their failures, hide their errors, agree with their superordinates, accept all procedures and policies, hoard information to use as power, and keep their questions and ideas private and unvoiced.

The assumption is that if the "organization", or presumably its managers, wants to promote the continuous learning of its employees, then "it" should create conditions that encourage and enhance learning. Commonly, organizations attempting to become "learning organizations" are now implementing efforts that build on or echo certain Total Quality Management initiatives of the 1980s: constructing self-directed teams of employees, modeling the importance of continuous learning, setting up "learning centers" stocked with self-assessment tools to help individuals figure out their competency deficits and with books and software for employee use, implementing mandatory job rotation so staff get a taste of new work opportunities, sending people on seminars to teach them learning skills, and developing "action-reflection" learning projects to encourage staff innovation and develop critical reflection skills.

The assumption is still that the organization undertakes to promote individuals' learning, even though the employee is usually expected to be "empowered" and take responsibility for his or her own on-going development in the new regime of continuous learning. The formalizing mechanisms wielded to promote learning are the traditional loci for organizational development: leadership, structure, reward systems, information flow, and training.

The women in this study told stories of barriers to their learning which to a certain extent confirm those identified in the literature. Certainly in the section describing conditions that enhance workplace learning, we can speculate certain "negative" barriers mirrored by the "positive" enhancements that are compatible with parts of this list. The learning shut-down that occurs when there is insufficient opportunity for newness -- new tasks, new projects, or new human perspectives in one's work -- is the most prominent parallel between the literature and the learning stories of these women.

First, these women are mostly what adult education literature has come to understand as "self-directing" in their learning (for a review of the self-directed learning literature and its debates refer to Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). They believe themselves to be largely self-determining in the workplace except where recognizable material structures constrain their movements. They are internally motivated to learn, stretch their capacity, and change their approaches and meanings in their work, in ways they determine to be valuable. This motivation often emanates from some sort of practical work purpose confronting them, which provides the legitimatory framework for inspiring and sustaining the energy and time commitment to learn and change.

But many of the women's stories indicate that when they're in threatening situations or situations they view as having few possibilities for personal expansion and the pleasure of self-expression in ways they believe they enjoy, they become non self-directed, passive, lethargic, helpless, fearful. This attitude is despite the organization's efforts to actively "foster" and facilitate, to re-construct dominant ideologies to value reflection and risk-taking, to manipulate through rewards and other approval-granting mechanisms, and otherwise intervene to make people learn.

To understand what truly constitutes a "barrier" to learning for a particular woman in a particular workplace, we must penetrate and try to name more precisely the complexities of her personal meanings. These complexities are apparently invisible from the macro- organizational perspective in which learning organization theorists posture as cultural workers to transform material and social conditions.

First of all, outside of those barriers implied through the mirror-images of the positive workplace conditions that the women named as enhancers to learning, the women also readily recalled periods of their work history where they felt their learning "shut down". They pointed to explicit characteristics of the workplace that they believed contributed to their lack of learning in these periods. A small but important point that must be clarified here is that no one appeared consciously critical of the underpinning assumption shared by all -- that workplace learning *should* be ongoing. No one described these periods of conscious "non-learning" in positive terms, as renewal or rest or necessary stability supporting transition in another area of life.

From these women's perspective, there are two sources of barriers to learning: external conditions of work, and internal physical and psychological conditions that stifle or divert the energy and focus required for workplace learning. Naturally internal and external conditions are closely entwined, mutually shaping and being shaped by each other.

External barriers to learning

External barriers which the women in this study talked about can be sorted into four general areas: work activity that in its very nature stifles what for them is the essential creative impulse; a workplace culture or structures that somehow block a free flow of interactive communicative inquiry; a workplace community with whom they can find little moral or purposeful "fit"; workplace structures that limit what for them are necessary freedoms; and perceived coercion of any kind, implicit or explicit.

Work activity that in its very nature stifles what for these women is the essential creative impulse that prompts the will to know.

When many of the women were involved in kinds of work that they perceived to be destructive, self-defeating, or undermining; when they came to believe that their work activity was crippling their imagination and restricting their growth, learning as they understood it "shut down". Naturally an individual woman's feelings of what was "destructive" or "dehumanizing" work varied. Many of the women in this study showed themselves to be "global" thinkers (Flaherty, 1993), and were driven mad by detailed analytical work. Repetitive work in particular produced this state for many. This included work tasks of highly repetitive prescribed and regulated mechanical activities, such as form-filling or word processing, as well as a job that involved circling among the same sorts of activities year after year without sufficient novelty brought by new perspectives or dilemmas.

Pace and load of work affected learning in obvious ways. When a woman felt rushed or overloaded -- too many tasks competing for attention and not enough time or space for her to make sense of them, create a personal connection, and assert her control physically or psychologically over the work -- the delight in exploration so necessary to a "learning stance" gave way to a defensive protectionist stance.

Another condition that can shut down workplace learning is a project that goes nowhere, that fizzles or is blocked from making a concrete meaningful contribution that connects with the organization's other efforts and overall purposes. This situation surfaced frequently in various women's stories of work in a large organization. Very often, a woman acknowledged cynically the illogical forces and conflicting political interests that doomed the intended project purposes, then defined for herself a personal purpose for the project that ended up guiding its direction and her own learning along with it. This is an interesting example of creating a personal space for meaningful work within but not meaningfully integrated into the organization's network of activity. When a woman began to discern a pattern of projects, each representing people's trust and personal creative investment, being "shelved" or otherwise rendered impotent by the organization, she lost faith and often detached herself from its structures. Ironically, the implementation of the "learning organization" concept was one in particular that had raised critical suspicion among some of the women in this study precisely for its failure.

As one said, "It was a great idea, it just -- went nowhere. Now I'm in a new department, and they're talking about the same things we all got excited about two years ago -- here we go again."

One of the most powerfully stifling experiences for many women was being "demoted" --moved by the organization back to a job that reduced their scope of activity, generated a feeling of "going backwards", and didn't allow them to exercise the skills and express the self they had been developing through their work. These interpretations of a job transfer "back" implies a normative expectation that movement through a career should be "progressive", spiralling upwards or outwards in scope of responsibility, latitude, complexity of skills, and autonomy of decision making. The feelings of failure and struggles to find interests produced by the demotion all but shut down learning: the women were not actively reflecting and interpreting their experiences of lethargy and repressed rage to learn about their personal process of change -- they were usually just trying to survive them.

Workplace cultures or structures that somehow block a free flow of interactive communicative inquiry

For all of the women in this study, learning seemed blocked when they were forced to work without meaningful communicative interaction with other people. For some women who lived and worked at the margins of an organization, as critics or innovators, learning was hard when they had no one who truly understood them with whom to "bounce the ball" of their personal ideas, who would connect and take up the initiative, who would affirm their thinking and questions. For some, the opportunity to engage frequently in thoughtful talk with people was essential. For others who liked to feel more enmeshed with the organization, the flow of learning stopped simply when they were cut off from the ongoing exchange of talk, official or informal, that keeps relationships fluid and connected. Two key communicative barriers to learning were feeling alienated through exclusion from information or decisions, or feeling silenced when people didn't listen or understand.

A workplace community where women can find little moral or purposeful "fit"

When some women felt a lack of "fit" or deep connection with the workplace, they tended to adopt a defensive posture or withdraw altogether from the community in ways that prevented what they construed as meaningful learning experiences. Conditions that signaled "no fit" to some women included cultural norms demanding a person become something she viewed as inauthentic or less than her potential. Often a woman looked at the people around her in the workplace and asked, do I want to be like that? am I in any way aligned in thinking or working style with these people? If she changed after a period of time in a particular workplace community with which she once felt "fit", she often sensed a vague need to move on.

Another barrier to learning was created when a woman believed the workplace community was dominated by people she didn't respect, who to her had little credibility or ethical integrity. A third barrier to learning was perceived hypocrisy, where a woman felt the instability and isolation of not being able to trust what was said at face value, finding out that ulterior motives lurked behind the dialogue. The most powerful barrier seemed to be when a woman sensed a basic incongruency between her core identity and sites of commitment -- which tended to be servanthood and common good values of honesty, justice, reciprocal caring -- and what she discovered to be the real values governing the workplace activity, especially where these were revealed as material gain, consolidation of power, and competitive advantage above all other considerations.

Workplace structures that limit what for these women are necessary freedoms

All of the workplace conditions described up to this point as creating barriers to learning ultimately do, in some way, limit a woman's freedom to move and to think. Many women referred to the constraints placed on their work activity and therefore their learning by narrow and inflexible job descriptions, limited real responsibility, regulations and policy restraints, conventional gender norms, hierarchical layers, and controlling supervisors. Limited time and resources to work were not necessarily barriers to learning -- in fact, in some stories, these limits acted as incentives to creativity.

One informal barrier that women indicated was particularly difficult to confront was a narrow and incomplete image of oneself held by others, especially supervisors, that did not embrace a woman's growth and change, or even many of what she perceived to be the personal capabilities and knowledge she would like to exercise in her work.

This is not to deny the importance for many women of a clear structure in their work or workplaces which would provide a reference point or springboard for their labor and learning. Some seemed to like creating structures themselves for their work, while others liked to position themselves within existing frameworks. Some even encountered situations where, relative to their confidence and expertise, the unfettered freedom they had was overwhelming and created limits of anxiety, powerlessness, and helplessness. The difference between the scaffold that supports and liberates and the cage that fetters and controls seems to rely not upon the general autonomy available to the individual, but upon the degree to which the workplace structures allowed a woman to accomplish what she believed to be of most importance, and to express what she believes to be her most authentic self.

Perceived coercion of any kind, implicit or explicit

Related to limits is coercion. Coercion produced resistance among these women who sought opportunities to explore and learn opportunities in the workplace. Many of the women identified various forms of external coercion which they had experienced in the workplace, leading to certain defensive postures that prevented learning. Many identified as 'coercive' those courses they were forced to attend, or those informal learning opportunities led by someone else who decided the woman needed to learn something. When they were required to do tasks they didn't perceive as important in terms of their vision of what most needed to happen -- such as certain administrative tasks that a superordinate had assigned to them -- they became listless, and lost what seemed to be their natural orientation to work of curiosity, invention, and conscious awareness of the moment. When a women felt forced by a situation or another person to view herself as in deficit, requiring "upgrading" of skills that she had not already identified as things she wanted to get better at doing, the enthusiasm and confidence to learn drained away. When she felt she was being forced to critically reflect before she was ready -- when others told her she was traditional, wrong, or limited in her beliefs, or needed to change her practice -- she tended to discredit or ignore the voices. When she felt she was being confronted by language she perceived to be unnecessarily complex or exclusionary, she resisted it.

Curiously enough the ongoing workplace learning described by the women in this study, especially that learning which they named as their most critical learning, did not appear to be connected to the top-down organizational change efforts which were going on in their workplaces. In fact, the organization's own interventions often stifled the delicate bonds between people or the bubblings of excited discovery and experimentation and mutual sharing that these women talked about as being their learning. An example is

Nancy's story of the closely bonded nursing group who were co-opted by the organization's Total Quality Management initiative, and made into an artificially mandated team forced to follow an externally imposed structure of communicating. The result? Flat techno-rational discussions, devoid of the sparkling spontaneity, human connection at the point of need, and meaningful exchanges at the moment of shared experience that the nurses had looked forward to in their daily interactions.

Another example was Elizabeth's despondency about the new "learning initiative" for the government department in which she worked, which had ground to a halt. Her group's vision of encouraging people's learning at work -- exploring, innovating, experimenting -- had now been properly sculpted by the organization. Learning had been codified and classified into neat charts of fragmented competencies in which people's levels of deficit would be diagnosed. Elizabeth was in a stuck place, caught between two worlds. Her imagination flew in the world of the vision ignited among her participants in the small group of creative staff. But the worldview and discourse of the bureaucracy where she had to live and act seemed so remote from the vision that she could not imagine a link; the two worlds were incommensurate and uncommunicative. Her energy had died and the vision was wilting under the formalizing, calcifying organizational structures that had co-opted it.

Much of what these women seemed to think of as their most important learning through workplace experience evolved through a natural exchange of spirit, of energy. They learned about working with people through their collective involvement in challenging projects. They learned about themselves through the press of action that ignited surprising abilities. They learned technique through observing what worked and what didn't. They learned new behaviors watching role models. When a natural process became formalized by an organization, something live and vital and unpredictable seemed to die.

Internal barriers to learning

Naturally, internal responses cannot be cleanly separated from the external conditions that provoke these responses. For every "external" barrier listed in the previous section, the individual's configuration of her own response (represented here as either learning, non-learning, or blocked learning) is expressed and experienced as an internal barrier. Nor can external conditions of a workplace be considered wholly separated from a particular worker's participation in the co-construction of these conditions in her interactions with the community and its activity. The nature of her participation is partly determined by her internal condition.

But granting these blurry lines between "external" and "internal", there are some conditions preventing learning which appear to originate more within an individual than without, and some states of an individual stimulated by circumstances completely outside the workplace structures and activities and brought to the workplace by that individual. These conditions and states are discussed below, and include issues related to personal energy limits, anxiety, a sense of alienation from the community, and boredom.

The barrier of personal energy limits

Learning requires energy. Learning, like reading, is an active process. Learning requires the learner to take initiative and sustain engagement in the midst of uncertainty. Learning demands struggles with non-sense in a wilderness of meaning-making, and conflicts with values and morals. When people surf into a new situation, alert to unexpected waves and gullies and adapting resiliently to whatever they encounter, they need cognitive energy. When they confront difference, and respond by actively innovating or mediating or mapping the unfamiliar, they need creative energy. When they meet someone whose story can teach them if they choose to make the effort to reach out and listen deeply, they need relational energy. When they expose their comfortable routines and understandings to the tornado of a new idea that can leave their perspectives in tatters, they need psychological energy.

Cognitive, creative, relational, psychological, or any other kind of energy seems to demand a physical well-being to sustain it. One of the barriers to learning that became evident in the stories these women told of their workplace experiences was rooted in the limits of their physical bodies. When they were tired or ill, they became frustrated because they couldn't continue the concentration they felt they needed to learn. Sarah was only angry about her condition of Bells' Palsy to the extent that it limited her learning: "I'm getting tired, I'm worried about the day when I just don't want to go anymore." Persephone was so tired from juggling her university studies with her part-time counseling work and her work to sustain her family that she was concentrating on surviving, on getting through the "doing" of her life. She was having difficulty being fully present to the learning opportunities in any sphere of her life -- she just hadn't the energy to find creative ways around a controlling boss, to be resilient when a class presented overwhelming challenges, to explore and play and innovate with the programs at her workplace. Continuous improvement? She would have liked just one night of more than four hours' sleep.

The barrier of anxiety

Anxiety can block the energy needed to learn. When Marilyn was working in an environment that she described retrospectively as "squashing me, clamping me down", she became so tired and anxious that many of her energies were spent defending her self from the assaults and pressure, and surviving the repression. Janis's story of working on the documentary from hell is a survival tale, protecting herself from the roller coaster work rhythms conjured by a colleague who turned out to be "an anxiety junkie". Denise swung from a mode of high-energy exploratory learning, working flat-out overtime and weekends to finish a new advertising project, into a defensive, low-energy, "make me" mode when she discovered that the business owners might dupe her out of salary and reputation through certain unethical practices. She became anxious and tense, focusing her energy on protecting her self. Her interactions with the two owners during this period were not learning incidents of listening and collaborative understanding. These interactions were painful contestations of allegation, strategic maneuvers for territory and position, and adversarial ping-pong matches of oneupmanship.

Women's stories narrated throughout this document illustrate that when many are confronted by situations of real trauma and disjuncture in the workplace where they are accountable without support, psychological resources, strategies, or models guiding their actions, the primary response is to secure and defend the self against the threat. Their stance to the anxiety caused by the disjuncture may range from helplessness to defensiveness.

The barrier of feeling alienated from the community

A feeling of being shut off also blocks the energy to learn. When Sarah's new director did not tell her "the news" as it crossed his inbasket, or talk about his involvements and what he was learning, or stop to share his musings about what to do next or his responses to what was being done, or invite her to relate her ideas and feelings -- she felt closed off. The human connectedness she had enjoyed with the previous director, who had fostered a continual flow of talk and inquiry, had changed to an artificial game of channeling information pipelines: "All I want to know is, are the rules of the game being changed?" asked Sarah. She has given up trying to weave connections with him. The block has cast a shadow over her continuous learning.

The barrier of boredom

Boredom blocks the energy to learn. Repetitive activity or restricted freedom or a sense of self-repression eventually makes a person numb, and this numbness stifles the willingness to try, the curiosity to be alert, the energy to care. Paradoxically, boredom in a job seemed to emanate from a lack of an outlet to express creative energy. Stories these women told of jobs where they felt put "in a box", either by a controlling superordinate or by a restrictive role definition, often were marked by descriptions of feeling "lethargic" -- stale and depressed. "I'd go home on a Friday night -- you'd think I'd have lots of energy because I didn't really do anything all day -- but I'd be so lethargic all I'd want to do is vegetate at home. Channel surf. Eat lots of chocolate." Denise said, "I could hardly make myself get out of bed to go to work. I had zero energy." When I'm numbed by boredom I don't have the energy to confront difference, enter it, or dance with it down the long hall of windows and mirrors that is meaning-making.

Summary

The women's stories of work also indicated barriers to learning, conditions and situations producing a response different than what women described as "learning". External barriers to learning included work activity that in its very nature stifled what for some women was an essential creative impulse prompting the will to know. Workplace cultures or structures that blocked a free flow of interactive communicative inquiry, or that limited what for some women were necessary freedoms to create and ask questions, also seemed to inhibit learning. Coercion of any kind seemed to trigger resistance and defensiveness among many women, rather than the creative process of learning. Most importantly, many women seemed to seek a workplace community where they could feel a moral or purposeful "fit". Without this fit, many women struggled to make sense of their work, and found that their enthusiasm and creative flexibility to learn new ideas and skills was dampened. Many of the internal barriers to learning that women reported were directly related to external workplace conditions that produced certain responses: feeling low energy, anxiety, boredom, or alienation from the workplace community.

In the workplace, these women encountered rich developmental possibilities as well as barriers to coming to know the self and expand its resources and capabilities. Many women indicated that they learn to name and confront thorny work-learning-life issues. They struggled to find release and support for their creative initiatives in learning and working in workplace bureaucracies; to balance a need for security and a need for freedom in their work and workplace; and to compromise or reconcile their "authentic" selves with personally dissonant workplace conditions like patriarchal structures, shallow codified knowledge, an official discourse incapable of naming the complexities of the material reality they observed, terrifying politics, repressive measures masquerading as emancipatory initiatives (such as "team learning" that is accountable to pre-determined management objectives), an intolerably fast pace, and behavioral norms emphasizing style, directness, and instrumental productivity. At the time of this writing, all but two of the seventeen women were seriously exploring self-employment ventures.

Chapter 10

Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

This study has taken me on a journey far outside the safe fences I had originally erected to describe a manageable area of inquiry. In the introduction of this dissertation I explained how my study purpose shifted when my beginning assumptions disintegrated: I moved from wanting to develop programs to help people change and learn in the workplace to seeing such programs as manipulative, incongruent with workers' desires and meanings, and ultimately unsound in ethical, epistemological, and pedagogical foundations. But this study took me even farther afield, ultimately challenging my deepest beliefs about the meaning and purpose of work, the stability of the modern market economy, and the educators' control and commodification of learning. Thus the most important findings of this study, for me, are the questions that I am now impatient to continue pursuing in my personal research.

Different readers will find value and hope in various findings that are discussed at length throughout the dissertation. But in this chapter I intend to put forward particular insights or findings selected from this study that perhaps speak most strongly to the current ideologies and prevailing practices in workplace learning. Each insight is presented with a brief suggestion of its implications for theory and practice, followed by questions that intrigue me and that may prick the imaginations of others interested in researching this area further.

Insights about Intention, Disjuncture, and Positionality

Findings of the study

The significance of intention: A woman's learning in the workplace is guided by, given meaning according to, and folded into behavior when it is congruent with that woman's intentions.

In this study I have been describing intention in its broadest possible meaning: as overall life directions as well as current agendas and purposes of the moment. Intention is the will to know that is essential to engage attention and frame an experience as significant somehow to this woman in this environment. Simply, we learn what we want to learn. This is why, if we are trying to understand what drives a continuous learner and which characteristics cause her to approach her workworld as a continual adventure of learning, it is crucial to look at her intentions.

The intentions of women continuous learners: Continuous learners have a hunger to keep searching. Continuous learners seek creative challenge and risk. Continuous learners seek to be engaged with passion in their work. Continuous learners seek work that integrates a moral purpose.

The women in this study were chosen because they had indicated throughout their work-lives a strong interest in changing and adapting and learning everything possible to be competent in their work. But these women did more than embrace a learning opportunity as it arose in their work: they seemed to be hungry for it. Most of them were restless seekers, pushing to understand more, grow more, become more. Most wanted to work, not escape it: they wanted to work hard, and valued work as self-expression and fulfillment of personal purpose. Many of the women sought not to master and specialize, but to move on to new projects and new challenges. They didn't just expect to find creative opportunities, they demanded this in their work. Through their work they seemed to seek vocation, not salary: above all most women wanted to serve and make a contribution, make a difference in the world, which for some turned into a struggle to understand what one called "the compulsive need to nurture". Passion was an important theme in all the biographies. These women sought not the passion of momentary excitement or pleasure, but an enduring passion of commitment to a particular endeavor that engaged their souls and their longing to be more fully human. They sought work that called them to transcend themselves.

The significance of disjuncture: A woman's learning at any moment in the workplace or in later reflection depends on the quality of the disjuncture perceived by that person, the woman's perception of and response to that disjuncture, and the woman's choice to be open to touch or be touched by that disjuncture.

This study argues that "disjuncture" -- a gap between one's past biography and the immediate experience being apprehended -- is an essential spark for the learning process. One perspective views disjuncture as a dilemma or other irregularity causing dissonance in the learner's meaning equilibrium, a dissonance that the learner seeks to restore through a problem-solving learning process. Another perspective understands disjuncture as deliberate question-raising, experimenting in a creating process. Thus disjuncture can be thought of as seeking freedom from difficulty, or seeking new imaginative possibilities. This study is inconclusive about whether disjuncture must be consciously perceived or not for learning to unfold.

The disjunctures of women continuous learners: Continuous learners create disjunctures by seeking risks, asking why questions, and creating new possibilities. Continuous learners are discerning and attend to disjunctures by being awake to the here-and-now, listening to discrepancies, and naming and owning mistakes. Continuous learners reflect to make sense of disjunctures. Continuous learners know, name, and use strategies to deal with the discomfort of opening up to disjuncture.

In this study it became clear that women who learn continuously from their work not only are alert to disjunctures but also often actively seek them. Perhaps one of the most striking similarities among the women in this study was their attentiveness to the now, their movement towards a fuller awakening or mindfulness to both inner and outer dimensions of the present experiences unfolding around them in their work, however mundane. One called this "tasting", another talked of "savoring" the quality and texture of lived experiences.

Besides most women's sensitivity to their environments that enabled their vulnerability to disjunctures, many indicated a habit of actively questioning their world: asking to know more, to know how and why, and asking why not. To ask is to discern the question, to care to follow it, to take initiative to embark on the chase, and to be willing to humble one's status as a knower and assume the position of one who does not know.

Finally, an important theme was the strategies developed by women who learn continuously in their workplaces to cope with the pain of disjuncture. Many acknowledged as real the emotional, psychological and practical demands at various phases of the (learning) process of following disjuncture, and sought specific assistance to work through these demands.

The significance of positionality: A woman's ability to learn from a workplace experience depends upon a position of openness to that experience.

This study showed that disjuncture and intentionality are entwined with positionality such that each of these three elements influences the other in terms of the learner's direction of attention, engagement with and interpretation of that experience, and her ultimate self-investment in the meaning of that experience to construct new knowledge. The study argues that positionality to learn depends upon openness, or what van Manen (1990) and Steiner (1989) both describe as "tact". Openness can be variously thought of as being subordinate, humble, trusting, vulnerable, invitational, or unfrozen to a new experience. Opening up to the real presence of another -- whether it be an other idea, person, way of practice, language, experience -- requires one to relinquish one or more protective mechanisms of critical thinking and skepticism, anchors of practice in competency and mastery, anchors of beliefs in stable foundations, and anchors of identity in values, self-concept, and relational positionality. Somehow women tended to find ways to negotiate a delicate balance in their learning processes between complete submersion in their openness to "otherness", and maintaining boundaries of self while making space for otherness.

The positionality of women continuous learners: Continuous learners seek a workplace community where they feel a fit with their own moral purposes. Some seek a position that adapts to what is; others seek a position that innovates to change the community to what could be. In whatever way women position themselves, when they find the essential fit of moral purpose with a community, they can usually trust others, and be open to otherness. Continuous learners are usually comfortable opening to the presence of an other because they feel grounded in a solid understanding of self and self-power and are not easily threatened when making space for newness. Continuous learners seek to connect with others and value an interconnected community, and thus approach other people with openness.

Many of the women in this study indicated that they tended to approach new jobs, new challenges, new people, and new ideas with openness. Most seem unhindered by aspirations to power over others through job position or financial status, territorial expansion, or knowledge-hoarding. However, most women evaluated new ideas carefully; they had established anchors in particular beliefs and self-understandings and were not vulnerable to all new ideologies, technologies, powerful people claiming to be their role models, and propaganda bombarding them in the workplace. The essential compass tended to be what most came to hear and trust as an inner voice.

Positionality in any given experience seems to be affected by this inner voice. Most of the women described a similar search in life and through the work of life that is guided by this inner voice, whether it was felt as a call from the divine or as a wise intuitive presence within the self. The search was for a "fit" in work. The fit was articulated variously as seeking authentic self-expression, seeking rich and authentic interpersonal connections, and seeking full interconnection with a community.

Positionality towards a new idea or experience was also influenced by these women's tendency to seek a balance between stability and change. Women develop and draw power from solid moral and epistemological anchors that unify their lives and distinguish their presence and identity from the elements swirling around them. At the same time they seek out change, or the new challenges and disruptions that give birth to creative expression.

Implications for research and practice

People's intentionality, when liberated, is clearly a powerful force in their ways of knowing and their energies of work. Two implications are worth noting. First, intentionality as defined in this study appears to be a worthwhile dimension for further study. This concept emancipates thinking about workplace learning from terms like "motivation" and "non-learning" and "resistant learners", and directs understandings of learning more to epistemological concepts of personal search, ways of engaging, processes of meaning-making, and moral-ethical dimensions of purpose as these influence ways of knowing practice. To better understand and facilitate workplace learning we need to employ the kinds of research that has developed to explore teachers' ways of knowing in the past decade (i.e., see Shulman, 1987; Lyons, 1990) through narrative and other qualitative methods. We need to look at goals, a conventional mainstay of educational programming, and examine how and when the real goals of learning emerge for the learner in the ongoing experience of workplace action, learning, and reflection. Research of intentionality would be best directed at finding out how people answer the questions, "what is most worth doing?" and "what is my purpose in my life through this work?"

Second, the findings of this study about individual intentionality, disjuncture, and positionality raise serious questions about educational interventions based upon prescribed outcomes, or competency-based approaches that preclude individuals' complex ways of constructing knowledge. Even "self-directed learning" programs somehow segregate learning from the on-going processes through which individuals come to know their worlds, decide how to perform in these worlds, and change their visions. Whether a woman learns behaviors which might be judged by particular socio-cultural criteria to be morally inappropriate or dysfunctional or useful or just idiosyncratic, whether a woman absorbs structures of meaning that are limiting or emancipatory or functional, learns understandings which are valued or not, a woman is continually learning. What educators must be clear about in any discussion of learning is a) what kinds of processes and experiences they accept and name as "learning", and b) what kinds of processes and experiences they are willing to accept as others' naming of what is learning.

Further research about knowledge production and reproduction in the workplace might also be profitably directed towards finding out what sorts of situations cause disjunctures for women, and how women interpret and respond differently to these to draw meaning from them. The implications of this study are that disjuncture cannot be created for a person by a well-intentioned educator. A learner must come to the question on her own. So is it true that only certain particularly attentive people seek awakening to the questions that guide their workplace learning? What factors influence a woman's choice to note this disjuncture and not that one, or to decline the offer to learn presented by a workplace disjuncture? For those who are more instrumentally focused, a potential focus for practice facilitating workplace learning might be developing "mindfulness" and "questioning" aptitudes among workers. Also, women might be helped to develop a language to attend to, observe precisely, and name what they actually see going on around them -- not what they think they should see, or expect to see, or believe is the right thing to see, or believe everybody else sees.

Regarding positionality, this study points to the need for a more precise understanding of how women position themselves to new ideas, experiences, and people different from themselves. What are the barriers to the open position required for learning? When and why do some women protect themselves from learning through positionality? What other layers flow through an individual's sense of her positionality within a community, and how do these dimensions influence the learning process for different women?

Women move in communities, in interpersonal relationships, and in their relation to particular knowings from outside to inside or back, from more peripheral to more central positions or back, and from more open to more closed positions. We need to look more closely at these movements in positionality among people in the workplace and examine how these correspond with learning. We might do well to shed our conventional insistence on naming and studying specific dimensions of difference that influence positionality, such as race, class, and gender, and free ourselves to take into our gaze the shimmering multiplicity of positional dynamics existing simultaneously in an given woman's relations with her various communities, objects without and elements within.

Insights about Self and Work

Findings of the study

Work and the workplace create an essential site for women's development of the self through adulthood.

Most of our time in adulthood between school graduation and retirement is spent working. Our work experience, with whatever people in whatever environment among whatever set of activities we construe to constitute our "work", is arguably one of the most significant influences fostering our continuing learning and development through adulthood. Merriam andYang (1996) corroborate this finding, that work is very powerful in psycho-social development. In particular, their research finds three work-related variables to be powerful in shaping developmental outcomes such as personal agency: the type of employer, work with people, and any periods of unemployment. Work with people was found to be the strongest influence on development: the more one interacts with people in work, the more one is likely to participate politically and socially, the more sensitive one is to social inequality, and the more internal the locus of control.

Learning about self, including learning about the self through understanding its distinctions from and relationships to others, is the most valued knowledge of women continuous learners.

This study found that women who are continuous learners focused much of their attention in their work-learning on understanding patterns of the self: its capabilities, its unique processes and characteristics, its preferences, and its shifting identity. They placed value on this knowledge of self, and take time to develop it. They approached new tasks and people projects with an attitude of "what can I learn here?" Their goal was to enter a process of learning in order to expand and express the self; the goal did not appear to be the accumulation of knowledge acquired through the learning process.

Women continuous learners derive much of their confidence by naming the self. They come to know and name aspects of the self, to accept and name the fluid movements of the self while building a sense of being grounded, to understand and name the idiosyncratic processes of one self's ways of learning and working.

The women in this study indicated that much of their grounding -- the stability and identity allowing them the confidence to take risks and be open to new beliefs -- developed as they learned to name knowledge for themselves, including knowledge of who they are and how they live. Work continually exposed them to new situations from which they had to construct meaning. As women came to trust their inner voice to discern and name what was happening in front of them, they developed a fluid sense of control and a personal power that allowed them to be resilient, feel competent, and accept change.

Integration of the public work-self and the private self is a key movement in women's workplace learning. For many, this integration was a spiritual quest: a longing to express and develop a full spiritual humanity and proceed towards something holy in and through one's work.

Women in this study demonstrated that through their experiences of various types and conditions of work and watching their own performance in these situations, they began to discern what work matched their authentic self and what didn't. Over the course of their careers many women became increasingly less apt to accept work that attenuated their potential to be fully human, or to adapt themselves to environments ruled by principles that women became convinced were shallow, pointless, or unethical. Some became more aware of their spiritual longings and their search for a "fit" when they found themselves struggling to find meaning in work or workplaces demanding opposite values: individualism, material consumption, aggressive progress and innovation, and competition.

Implications for research and practice

Undeniably the self is a key site for further inquiry in workplace learning. Although research focused on various areas of the self and self-development has a long-standing tradition in psychology, these understandings tended not to entwine the understandings of sociology and anthropology that are required to fully understand self-growth and change in the workplace. Research on intuition is just beginning, and certainly appears to be a fruitful area for further inquiry in workplace learning.

Spirituality in the workplace is a necessary but highly sensitive area for research and practice. Business has already ascertained the profits to be generated by incorporating spirituality into organizational mission and learning tasks to empower workers to greater productivity (see Senge, 1996). Somehow workplace learning researchers need to tap into and adapt the understandings and conceptual frameworks developed through centuries of theology to find ways of exploring spiritual longing and spiritual development as the breath of work and individual growth through work.

This research suggests that more focus on helping women hear and express the self in work is needed. Practice in helping people towards self-development already abounds. Much of this currently exists in two streams: programs and resources that assist people towards self-actualizing but ignore the workplace structures that diminish this potential, and programs and resources aimed at empowering people to self-actualize in ways that serve the organization's purposes. What may be needed are more critical approaches, such as those described by Collins (1990) and Hart (1990), to assist women to recognize the meanings, messages, and power forces governing the market economy, and to find ways of working within it towards self-development without subverting their interests to its machinery. Women may need help to identify the organizational barriers to their fulfillment in work, and to have validated their internal conflicts, and rages. Some women may need help to hear and develop their inner yearnings and intuitions, and to distance themselves from influence exercised by conservative elements in the workplace denouncing them as misguided, "un-real", or un-fitting. A potential area to be developed is that of helping people or women to come to understand and develop a language to name their own processes of learning, communication, beliefs -- not to overturn these, but to confirm and strengthen them.

The autobiographical method of this research holds potential for further research into self-development through work. This methodology has received much focus in educational research, particularly exploring school teachers' and students' development and ways of knowing in three distinct streams of research: the self as discursive formation, feminist autobiographical reclamation of self, and personal practical knowledge revealed through narrative (see Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). To date, the bulk of empirical research on continuous learning in the workplace has been derived from case studies of organizations and their implementation of learning programs. Autobiographical research archiving the work lives and meanings of individuals belonging to different groups of practitioners would yield the rich understandings needed to shake free of the limitations of organizational-based research.

Work in "mapping subjectivity" is expanding in disciplines such as human geography, feminist poststructuralism, and popular cultural studies, but is only just beginning to influence the sorts of questions asked by adult education theorists and researchers (Usher, 1995). The rich data provided by this study deserves further archival, and work examining women's subjectivity in the workplace using some of the theoretical tools suggested by theorists such as Thrift and Pile (1995) promises to yield helpful responses to such questions as, where is agency in the postmodern subject? What does it mean to be a knowing woman (subject) in the workplace? Is there hope for (re) claiming subjectivity in the current "crisis of meaning" (Lather, 1991)? Meanwhile, the spirituality of women and work, an evidently important theme in this study, is a fascinating line of analysis I am continuing to follow. Spirituality is an undertheorized area in adult education. However, the vast literature of theology and conversion awaits those adult educators who wish to select and experiment with theological constructs, and perhaps even ways other than rational analysis and argument, in coming to understand phenomena such as spirituality.

Insights about the Nature of Learning in the Workplace

Findings of the study

Workplace learning is embodied in the whole self: cognitive, emotive, spiritual, intuitive, sensual, kinesthetic.

This study suggests that the entire process of learning is one of folding knowledge into the self. The women often seemed to have a difficult time identifying their knowledge because once it was internalized, it became part of their way of being, indistinguishable from who they were. What women are often aware of in their process of knowledge construction is the sudden flash into consciousness of learning: either a momentary synthesis, a confirmation of something already embedded, an answer to a question, a new insight or perspective. What they often knew and used everyday in work was an orientation to people, tasks, and information that simultaneously involved all parts of self. Much important learning in the workplace appeared to be a conscious coming-to-awareness of what has been bodily learned in practice and folded into the body: women told stories of their capabilities and knowledge being revealed to them through their own, surprising, performative acts invoked by work demands.

Workplace learning is embedded in the situated context of the moment, its environment, its agenda, its actors and their relations, its location and movement, and its tone.

Most women in this study didn't think in terms of compiling knowledge like a commodity. Knowledge of the concrete seemed to flow through them. Whatever they needed to know at a given moment to perform a task or solve a problem, they learned: this included all the technical, conceptual, social-relational, cultural, and personal knowledge required by the activity. At the conclusion of the activity they saw themselves as "moving on" to new understandings. The "takeaway" knowledge of a project, if any, was a sense of a deeper, more expansive or powerful self, not necessarily discrete new skills. Any discrete skills or concepts the women encountered and used in their work they reported as decaying from memory quickly after they stopped working with them.

Workplace learning of a woman is significantly influenced by the values and models of learning evident in a knowledge community for which she feels a particular affinity.

The nature of work and the ethos of the work community have a significant influence on women's development and learning. Women who were exposed to communities of creative energetic people developed a creative energy towards their work; women who experienced membership in a maverick group of critical thinkers often adopted this attitude towards future endeavors; women who worked in communities valuing systematic planning and structured goal-setting often were shaped accordingly.

Some of the most significant workplace learning unfolds in projects working with other people.

Many women indicated they learned when immersed in a real environment, propelled by a project they care about, especially one that helped other people. Thus it appears that projects offering creative freedom are valuable in opening learning opportunities and liberating the longing for creative expression . Projects combine a clear structure that provides a reference point, a legitimate springboard for learning, with freedom and a sense of broaching new frontiers that encourages the excitement of learning as "creating" -- very different in flavor, energy, and personal investment to learning that is "keeping up with" pre-determined expectations.

Workplace learning of women centers around listening and connecting with other people.

Most of the women placed great value on listening to people, setting aside the self to enter another's world non-judgmentally, courageously, curiously, empathetically. They indicated a personal goal was to improve their ability to make meaning of what others say and to find ways to empathize with very different perspectives and reference points. Most of them valued learning about other people, not only how to relate with trust and authenticity balanced with self-respect and protection of personal boundaries, but also how to appreciate difference and expand one's own perspectives by integrating this diversity.

Implications for research and practice

Many implications for practice in facilitating workplace learning arise from this study. First is the appreciation that workplace learning is holistic: it cannot be quantified, reduced for convenience to time-bounded classroom approaches to training, nor flow-charted into fragmented performance outcomes. Second is the appreciation that learning cannot be "transferred" from classroom to job-site as easily as the linguistic logic would seduce us to believe. Third is the appreciation that workplace knowledge cannot necessarily be conceptualized as cumulative. In fact, as an individual cycles through various jobs which require her to learn various skills, the residual retention and practice of these skills is dubious. Something deeper appears to develop through the various technical learnings demanded by the workplace, and this something is what people point to as their most significant learning. Fourth is the realization that technical knowledge (skills and concepts), as holistically emotional, intuitive and attitudinal as it is in the learning and doing process, is embodied fairly quickly when a woman's own intentions are aligned with experiences instructing her in certain procedures.

By far the most effective means by which many women in this study embodied new procedures was through the presence of strong role models in apprenticeship. Apprenticeship periods for some women approaching new work are crucial. During apprenticeship some women need opportunity to try multiple tasks and to observe and ask questions of a variety of other people performing those tasks. Many need an informal supportive network of listeners. This research would suggest that role models, especially other women, are needed for women beginning careers, models who actively listen to a novice and build rapport as well as answer questions and show clearly how things are to be done. The importance of community ethos in shaping approaches to workplace learning points to issues of organizational culture and leadership.

The women in this study often liked to explore and experiment on their own, with varying degrees of assistance whose input they liked to control. Many of them did not appreciate external facilitators or educational interventions imposed by an organization. In fact, some of the planned interventions such as learning organization initiatives stifled what was unfolding naturally in informal collaboration. Most liked the opportunities to teach others in order to learn. They asked why questions abundantly, and the resistance they encountered seemed to indicate that more emphasis should be placed on organizational efforts directed towards teaching management how to make use of these questions, rather than teaching people how to become critical questioners.

Finally, this study shows that women need time to learn, especially after they've past the exciting first period of learning how to "survive" in a new job or community. Specifically they need time to listen to other people (and a workplace culture that places value on such activity). They need time -- "blank time" as Liz called it -- to ponder. The more assertive women learners often organized their activities to allot this time for themselves. Perhaps facilitators can help others who subjugate their needs more readily to the hectic tempos and performance values of most workplaces to also legitimize their needs for time.

For researchers in workplace learning, especially experiential learning which this study found to be so significant in work learning, there is sparse empirical study documenting individuals' learning processes of experience to test the numerous theories of experiential learning. Outcomes of programs such as experiential adventure programs, action-reflection learning programs, and cognitive apprenticeship programs, all enjoying a measure of popularity in current workplace learning, need to be more closely examined in terms of individual change and realizations.

We need to examine the relationship between "experience", "doing", and "thinking" as these elements interplay in the complexities of people's own perspectives on their learning. What is the role of action in experiential learning? What is the nature of reflection? What about processes of being, stillness, and integration, which are conventionally not included in understandings of learning through "action"? We need to ask questions such as, what is the nature of unlearning, and re-learning? Experiential learning assumes that such processes take place. If so, do people truly discard certain understandings or habits? What about the shadow traces that remain of old "unlearned" behaviors and habits -- as any ex-smoker can attest -- and how do these shadows influence the way women as well as men make new understandings?

We need to explore more carefully what, in a heterogeneous world, comprises knowledge. The question of truth or error in workplace knowledge which figures so prominently in learning organization literature sometimes misses the point. Better questions might be, what is relevant? What is worth knowing and doing in a particular situated moment for a particular actor or community? What is convenient for whom, and what should be done next?

Insights about Modern Workplaces, Training, and Continuous Learning Ideologies

Findings of the study

This study found that learning organization and continuous workplace learning literature tends to be unsatisfactorily shallow, ignoring many dimensions of human development and meaning making which fundamentally shape how and what people learn in their work. First, this literature focuses on learning in the realm of experience, which is often narrowly conceived as action or "doing". Second, the literature often assumes as given the end purpose of work knowledge to be more competent performance -- an assumption refuted by the findings of this study that people, or at least women who view themselves as continuous learners, view their purpose more broadly as serving others and deepening and expanding the self. Third, the literature tends to ignore dimensions of knowing-in-practice such as personal ethics, the sense of mission, the relationship between craft and self, the bases of people's truth claims and contradictory claims, their perceptions and representations of their environments, and their sense of self as knowers. Fourth, the literature tends to parcel off reflection, action, intuition, and even spirituality as separate but related dimensions of personhood. Learning and doing still tend to be conceptualized as essentially separate endeavors. This brittle conceptualization cracks under the weight of documentation provided by this study showing women's multi-layered and holistic ways of constructing knowledge.

Workplace learning initiatives in practice still consist largely of programs especially structured to produce "learning" through intervention in the shape of educational agents (whether these be formal training experiences in classrooms, or action-reflection projects in dialogue groups, or in projects, or apprenticeship-coaching programs, or "self-directed learning" programs that are still packaged and regulated by instructional designers). Educational agents along with their ideological apparatus firmly grounded in "schooling" thus maintain control of workplace learning and situate themselves at the helm of the current shift to transform workplaces into continuously learning communities.

The other aspect of practice that this study found was that women who are continuous learners often have a difficult time finding a commodious workplace environment that will support or even permit the activities that most enhance their development of what they call significant knowledge. More than anything women needed freedom, as well as a supportive structure. But many organizations seem to be spending lots of time "developing" learning cultures or convincing their workers to be "learners" when their own chaotic structures and controlling mechanisms often prevent continuous learners from raising questions, seeking challenges, expressing and developing an authentic self, channeling creative energy into projects and engaging with passion in meaningful work that serves authentic human needs in the world. Many barriers to learning are erected or maintained by some organizations, barriers which prevent people's growth and learning. This study found that the vast majority of continuously learning women, according to the description of continuous learners that would-be "learning organizations" claim to value, eventually leave workplace organizations despite secure salary and comfortable working conditions to seek meaningful work and room to grow.

Implications for research and practice

Learning organization literature offers much promise and valuable practical suggestions. Its sentimentality and hope certainly has captured the imaginations of business leaders and workplace educators across North America. However, early adopters of continuous learning initiatives are struggling with the messy reality of learning organization principles in practice (Marsick, Watkins, O'Neil, Dixon, Catalanello, 1994). If more precise thought and study is not brought to bear on this whole concept of continuous learning in work, I fear it may eventually slip into historical obscurity as one flavor of the month that just didn't sell.

What may be needed is robust critical examination of the principles of continuous learning and learning organizations. More work is required to bring together the streams of literature expounding various forms of workplace learning and teaching, to make explicit the common patterns and question their assumptions against current understandings of how people really learn and change and grow. More empirical research is also required to document learning organization initiatives from the perspectives of different individuals, their stories and their views of themselves and their work. We need to know what is really going on from the site of the local and the particular, not just what managers believe should be going on from the site of the global and the general. This research needs to be tested critically against the general principles and language of learning organizations that is currently used widely and accepted uncritically.

There needs to be, in workplace learning initiatives as well as research, more focus on understanding what meanings people construct from what goes on. This should happen in intimate one-on-one conversations that stop to clarify and ask: what's going on for you? what are you thinking? what are you feeling? what do you want to happen? what is preventing this from happening? what choices are you making to prevent this from happening?

It may be up to educators to reclaim learning as an individual's journey and enterprise. We cannot necessarily restructure the workplace of the market economy to be governed by communicative principles, nor can we change current meanings of productivity to include what Hart (1990) calls "sustenance" work: labor to sustain and nourish human life. But educators can play a role in redirecting inquiry and practice in workplace learning from the current dominant enterprise of shaping the worker to fit the hyperactive demands of would-be learning organizations, to focusing on individual's ways of knowing, being, and becoming.

Recent research exploring dimensions of situatedness (Lave and Wenger, 1993) and the "coordinates" of subjectivity (Thrift and Pile, 1995) point to questions of import that would prove helpful in guiding future inquiry into workplace learning. Dimensions of situated experiential knowing such as location and movement, regulatory discursive systems and social practices, time and the way different rhythms are experienced, individual corporality, and the joint-action of practice have been theorized by poststructuralists, human geographers, and cultural analysts. The sophisticated depth and breadth of theory unfolding from these analyses (i.e., see Thrift and Pile, 1995) open fertile valleys for workplace learning researchers.

In Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm the complexity of workplace learning and the importance of work and workplace in self-development. Work is crucial terrain where women map journeys to seek meaning, identity, and connection in the world. But the fact that women's intentions determine what and how they perceive, value, engage in, and learn from workplace experience has profound implications. Some intentions may be aligned with the organization's objectives of innovation or open dialogue, but the focus of the learner for new challenge, creative passion, meaningful connection, service to others, self-knowledge, and self-expression directs how and what women learn in ways not necessarily aligned with organizational productivity and competitive advantage.

This study prompts some of the same questions about the assumptions and findings of workplace learning literature that critical adult educators (Finger and Woolis, 1994; Hart, 1992, 1993; Noble, 1990; Welton, 1991) raise: To what ends are professional pedagogues posturing as engineers of "learning organizations" situating themselves? What kinds of knowledge are valued and encouraged most, and what kinds are ignored? Whose learning and development is the focus? Whose discourse predominates? What sorts of human selves are being molded or repressed by organizational "learning" cultures? What are the justifications and implications of emphasizing, in such a powerful institution of learning as the paycheck provider, values such as innovation, "continuous improvement," "team" work in its diverse manifestations, "systems thinking," and critical reflection? What do organizational efforts to teach such values and perspectives produce?

This study suggests that current literature in workplace learning needs to better understand the individual's meanings of work and learning. What seems missing from the literature is an appreciation of how the circles of people's lives and learning cross between family, work, household duty, personal relationships, play, and spirituality. My study suggests that, eventually, women find themselves asking difficult questions about the purposes of tasks and projects in their work: what is worth doing? and whose reference point is the best source of criteria for deciding? As their values begin to shift from allegiance to organizationally-approved activity and learning more to "inner voices" defining the purpose and priority of work and what is worth knowing, many women appear to move towards activity and learning focusing more upon understanding others and self, and participating in growing connective communities, than on concrete material production. This orientation is not usually congruent with organizational visions, missions, and continuous learning initiatives.

Educators need to tread carefully on the moral eggshells of this workplace learning focus. Presumably an educator's goal is not to create more profitable or competitive organizations, but to acknowledge that life within workplace organizations can significantly affect what people become over their years in the workplace: the principles they come to believe, the knowledge they create, the behavioral habits they develop, the confidence in their own judgment and competent action they exercise, the thinking and creating abilities they are challenged to invoke, and the sense of self they weave. What does it *mean* to improvise a "fuller and more abundant life" through the knowing/doing/being moments that are people's lives in their work? We can only ask the people doing the learning.

Bibliography

Anderson, K., Armitage, S., Jack, D., & Wittmer, J. (1990). Beginning where we are: Feminist methodology in oral history. In J.M. Nielsen (Ed.), *Feminist research methods: Exemplary readings in the social sciences* (pp. 94-112). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Argyris, C. (1990). *Overcoming organizational defenses*. Needham, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Argyris, C. (1993). *Organizational learning*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory* . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Barlow, M. & Robertson, H. (1994). *Class warfare: The assault on Canada's schools.* Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books.

Baskett, H.K.M. & Marsick, V.J. (1992). Confronting new understandings about professional learning and change. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 55*, 89-96.

Baskett, H.K.M., Marsick, V.J. & Cervero, R.M. (1992). Putting theory to practice and practice to theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 55*, 109-118.

Bateson, M.C. (1990). *Composing a life*. New York: Plume Books.

Beck, N. (1995). *Shifting gears. . . Thriving in the new economy*. Toronto, ON: Nuala Beck and Associates.

Belenky, M.F., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger, N.B., & Tarule, J.M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. New York: Basic Books.

Benack, S., & Basseches, M.A. (1989). Dialectical thinking and relativistic epistemology: Their relation in adult development. In M.L. Commons, J.D. Sinnott, F.A. Richards, & C. Armon (Eds.), *Adult development*. New York: Praegar.

Benner, P. (1984). *From novice to expert: Excellence and power in clinical nursing practice*. Melno Park, CA: Addison Wesley.

Beno, J. (1994). Conceptions of instruction in the workplace. *Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference*, (pp. 31-36). Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee .

Birkerts, S. (1994). *The Gutenberg elegies: The fate of reading in an electronic age.* London: Faber and Faber.

Block, P. (1993). *Stewardship: Choosing service over self-interest.*. San Francisco: Berrett- Koehler.

Bolman, L.G. & Deal, T.E. (1995). *Leading with soul: An uncommon journey of spirit* . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Boreham, N.C. (1992). Harnessing implicit knowing to improve medical practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 55* , 71-78.

Borgmann, A. (1992). *Crossing the postmodern divide*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Boud, D. (1994). Conceptualizing learning from experience: Developing a model for facilitation. *Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 49-54). Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee .

Bridges, W. (1991). *Managing transitions: Making the most of change*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Britton, J. (1970). *Language and learning*. Hammondsworth: Penguin.

Brookfield, S.D. (1987). Significant personal learning. In D. Boud & Griffin, V. (Eds.), *Appreciating adults learning:From the learner's perspective* (pp. 64-75). London: Kogan Page.

Brookfield, S.D. (1987). *Developing critical thinkers: Challenging adults to explore alternative ways of thinking and acting*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Brookfield, S.D. (1990).*The skillful teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Brooks, A.K. (1995). The myth of self-directed work teams and the ineffectiveness of team effectiveness training: An argument with special reference to teams that produce knowledge . *Proceedings of the 36th Annual Adult Education Research Conference*, (pp. 41-48). Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta.

Brown, J.S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher, 18* (1), 32-42.

Butt, R., & Raymond, D. (1987). Arguments for using qualitative approaches in understanding teacher thinking: The case for biography. *JCT , 7* (1), 63-69.

Butt, R., Raymond, D. & Yamagishi, L. (1988). Autobiographic praxis: Studying the formation of teachers' knowledge. *JCT , 7* (4), 87-164.

Clark, M.C., Caffarella, R.S., & Ingram, P.B. (1994). The view from beneath the ceiling: The link between development and practice for women in midmanagement leadership roles. *Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference*, (pp. 91-96).Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee.

Caldwell, B.J. & Carter, E.M.A.. (1993). Transforming the workplace. In B.J. Caldwell & E.M.A. Carter (Eds.), *The return of the mentor: Strategies for workplace learning* (pp. 205-220). London: The Falmer Press.

Campbell, J. (1988). *The power of myth*. New York: Anchor-Doubleday.

Catalanello, R., Dixon, N., Marsick, V., O'Neil, J., & Watkins, K. (1993). *Portrait of the learning organization: A study conducted for the American Society for Training and Development, Learning Organization Network*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Society for Training and Development. Atlanta, Georgia.

Carruthers, J. (1993). The principles and practices of mentoring. In B.J. Caldwell & E.M.A. Carter (Eds.), *The return of the mentor: Strategies for workplace learning* (pp. 9-24). London: The Falmer Press.

Carter, K. (1993). The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. *Education Researcher, 22* (1), 5-12, 18.

Cervero, R.M. (1988). *Effective continuing education for professionals*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cervero, R.M. (1992). Professional practice, learning, and continuing education: An integrated perspective. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 2* (2), 91-101.

Cervero, R.M. & Wilson, A.L. (1994). *Planning responsibly for adult education: A guide to negotiating power and interests* . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (1991). Narrative and story in practice and research. In D.A.Schön (Ed.), *The reflective turn* (pp. 258-281). New York: Teachers College Press.

Coady, M. (1957). *My story.* Text of an interview for CBC-TV July 8, 1957. Available from St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, NS.

Cocks, J. (1985). Suspicious pleasures: On teaching feminist theory. In M. Culluy & C. Portuges (Eds.), *Gendered subjects* (pp. 168-185). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Cohen, A. (1994). *Self-consciousness: An alternative anthropology of identity*. London: Routledge.

Collins, M. (1990). *Adult education as vocation*. London: Routledge.

Connelly, F.M. & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Education Researcher, 19* (4), 2-14.

Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology, 13* (1), 13-21.

Covey, S.R. (1989). *The seven habits of highly effective people*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Cunningham, P.M. (1992). From Freire to feminism: The North American experience with critical pedagogy. *Adult Education Quarterly* , *42* (3), 180-191.

Cunningham, P. M. (1993). The politics of workers' education: Preparing workers to sleep with the enemy. *Adult Learning* , *5* (1), 13-17.

Curry, L., Wengin, J.F., & Associates. (1993). *Educating professionals: Responding to new expectations for competence and accountability*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Daloz, L. A. (1988). Beyond tribalism: Renaming the good, the true, and the beautiful. *Adult Education Quarterly, 38* (4), 234-241.

Deshler, D. (1991). Metaphor analysis: Exorcising social ghosts. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Fostering criticial reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning* (pp. 296-313). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Diamond, C.T. (1991). *Teacher education as transformation: A psychological perspective*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Dixon, N. (1993). *Report to the Conference Board of Canada on organizational learning*. Report prepared for the Conference Board of Canada, Ottawa, ON.

Dominice, P. F. (1990). Composing education biographies: Group reflection through life histories. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning* (pp. 194-212). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dubois, B. (1983). Passionate scholarship: Notes on values, knowing and method in feminist social science. In G. Bowles & R. Duelli Klein (Eds.), *Theories of women's studies* (pp. 105-116). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Duelli Klein, R.D. (1983). How to do what we want to do: Thoughts about feminst methodology. In G. Bowles & R. Duelli Klein (Eds.), *Theories of women's studies* (pp. 88-104). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Eisner, E.W. (1981). On the differences between scientific and artistic approaches to qualitative research. *Educational Researcher, 10* (4), 5-9.

Eisner, E.W. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice* . New York: Macmillan.

Elbaz, F. (1983). *Teacher thinking: A study of practical knowledge* . London: Croom Helm.

Elbaz, F. (1991). Research on teacher's knowledge: The evolution of a discourse. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 23* (1), 1-19.

Ellis, C. & Flaherty, M. (1992). *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ellsworth, E. (1992). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp.90-119). New York: Routledge.

Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society (2nd ed., rev.)* New York: Norton.

Erikson, E. H. (1982). *The life cycle completed: A review*. New York: Norton.

Estes, C.P. (1992). *Women who run with the wolves: Myths and stories of the wild woman archetype.* New York: Ballantine.

Farmer, J.A. Jr., Buckmaster, A., & LeGrand, B. (1992). Cognitive apprenticeship: Implications for continuing professional education. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 55* , 41-50.

Farren, C. (1995). The flexible career: Riding the career wave of the nineties. *The 1995 Annual: Volume 1, Training* (pp. 207-214). San Diego: Pfeiffer & Co.

Fay, B. (1987). *Critical social science: The limits to liberation* . Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Finger, M. & Woolis, D. (1994). Organizational learning, the learning organization, and adult education. *Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 151-156). Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee.

Flaherty, D. (1993). Global and analytical learners. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 60,* 3-18.

Flax, J. (1990). Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory. In L.J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/postmodernism*. New York: Routledge.

Flood, P. (1993). The learning organization. *The Worklife Report, 9* (2), 1-4.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archeology of knowledge* (A.M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). London: Tavistock.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punishment* (A. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). London: Allen Lane.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-77* (C. Gordon, Ed.). New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical inquiry, 8* , 777-795.

Foucault, M. (1988). History of systems of thought. In D.F. Bouchard (Ed.), *The Foucault reader* (pp. 32-50). New York: Pantheon.

Fox, R.D., Maxmanian, P.E., & Putnam, R.W. (1989). *Changing and learning in the lives of physicians* . New York: Praeger.

Gadamer, H. (1982). *Truth and method*. New York: Crossroad Publishing.

Geertz, C. (1988). *Works and lives: The anthropologist as author*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age* . Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.

Glaser, B.G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity* . Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glesne, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction.* New York: Longman.

Goldberg, N. (1993). *Long quiet highway: Waking up in America*. New York: Bantam.

Goffman, E. (1967). *The presentation of self in everyday life* . Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Gore, J. (1993). *The struggle for pedagogy* . New York: Routledge.

Gore, J. (1992). What can we do for you! What can "we" do for you? Struggling over empowerment in critical and feminist pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 54-73). New York, NY: Routledge.

Gould, R. (1978). *Transformations, growth and change in adult life*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Gould, R.L. The therapeutic learning program. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Fostering criticial reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning* (pp. 134-156). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Green, M. (1978). *Landscapes of learning* . New York: Teacher's College Press.

Griffin, V.R. (1987). Holistic learning/teaching in adult education: Would you play a one-string guitar? In T. Barer-Stein & J.A. Draper (Eds.), *The craft of teaching adults* (pp. 107-131). Toronto: Culture Concepts, Inc.

Grumet, M. (1990). Retrospective: Autobiography and the analysis of educational experience. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 20* (3), 321-326.

Grumet, M. (1992). Existential and phenomenological foundations of autobiographical methods. In W.F. Pinar & W.M. Reynolds (Eds.), *Understanding the curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text* (pp. 28-43). New York: Teachers College Press.

Guba, Y.S. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal, 29* (2), 75-91.

Guba, Y.S. & Lincoln, E.G.(1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London: Sage.

Guglielmino, L. M. & Guglielmino, P. (1988). Self-directed learning in business and industry: An information age imperative. In H.B. Long and Associates (Eds.), *Self-directed learning: Applications and theory*. Athens: University of Georgia, Adult Education Department.

Habermas, J. (1972). *Knowledge and human interests* . London: Heinemann,

Habermas, J. (1984). *The theory of communicative action, Vol. 1, Reason and the rationalization of society* (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.

Hampsten, E. (1989).Considering more than a single reader. In Personal Narratives Group (Ed.). *Interpreting women's lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives* . Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Hart, M.U. (1992). *Working and educating for life: Feminist and international perspectives on adult education.* London: Routledge.

Hart, M. (1993). Educative or miseducative work: A critique of the current debate on work and education. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education, 7* (1), 19-36.

Hawkesworth, M. (1989). Knowers, knowing, known: Feminist theory and claims of truth. *Signs, 14* (3), 533-549.

Hayes, E.R. & Smith, L. (1994) Women in adult education: An analysis of perspectives in major journals. *Adult Education Quarterly, 44* (4), 201-221.

Heaney, T. (1995). *Learning to control democratically: Ethical questions in situated adult education.* Proceedings of the 36th Annual Adult Education Research Conference, (pp. 147-152). Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta.

Heidegger, M. (1977). Building dwelling thinking. In D. F. Krell (Ed.)*Martin Heidegger: Basic writings* (pp. 154-172). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Henwood, K.L., & Pidgeon, N.F. (1992). Qualitative research and psychological theorizing. *British Journal of Psychology*, 83, 97-111.

Hultsch, D.F. & Plemons, J.K. (1979). Life events and life span development. In P.B.Baltes and O.G. Brims (Eds.), *Lifespan development and behavior* (Vol.2) (pp. 136-152). New York: Academic Press.

Husserl, E. (1964a). *The Paris lectures* (P. Koestenbaum, Trans.). The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

Husserl, E. (1964). *The idea of phenomenology* (W.P. Alston & G. Nakhnikian, Trans.). The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

Hutchinson, S.A. (1988). Education and grounded theory. In R. Sherman & R. Webb (Eds.), *Qualitative research in education: Focus and methods* (pp. 123-140). New York: Falmer Press.

Jardine, D.W. (1992). Reflections on education, hermeneutics, and ambiguity: Hermeneutics as a restoring of life to its original difficulty. In W.F. Pinar & W.M. Reynolds (Eds.) *Understanding the curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text* (pp. 116-130). New York: Teachers College Press.

Jarvis, P. (1987). *Adult learning in the social context.* London: Croom Helm.

Jarvis, P. (1992) . *Paradoxes of learning: On becoming an individual in society.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Johnstone, B. (1989). *Community and contest: How women and men costruct their worlds in conversational narrative.* Paper presented at Women in America: Legacies of race and ethnicity, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

Kitchin, S. (1993). Preceptorship in hospitals. In B.J. Caldwell & E.M.A. Carter (Eds.), *The return of the mentor: Strategies for workplace learning* (pp. 91-112). London: The Falmer Press.

Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall.

Kofman, F.& Senge, P. (1995). *Building a learning organization.* Paper presented at "Setting the Standard for Executive Development" Conference, February 1995, held at Convention Inn South, Edmonton, AB.

Knowles, M.S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy* (2nd ed.) New York: Cambridge Books.

Knowles, M.S. & Associates. (1984). *Andragogy in action: Applying modern principles of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Knox, A.B. *Helping adults learn* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kramer, D.A. (1983) Post-formal operations? A need for further conceptualization. *Human Development, 26*, 91-105.

Lacan, J. (1978). *Ecrits, a selection* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). London: Havistock.

Laird, D. (1985). *Approaches to training and development (2nd ed.).* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Lange, B. (1996). Evoking a global consciousness: Teacher professional development and global education. *Proceedings of the 36th Annual Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 167-172). Tampa, FL:University of South Florida.

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern* . London, UK: Routledge.

Lather, P. (1992). Post-critical pedagogies: A feminist reading. In C. Luke and J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp.120-137). New York: Routledge.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lave, J. & Chaiklin, S. (1993). *Understanding practice: Perspectives in activity and context.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lebra, T. (1992). Self in Japanese culture. In N. Rosenberger (Ed.), *Japanese sense of self*, (pp. 105-120). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lessing, D. (1986). *Prisons we choose to live inside*. Toronto: CBC Enterprises.

Levinson, D.J. (1986). A conception of adult development. *American Psychologist, 41* (1), 3-13.

Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social science*. New York: Harper Collins.

Lovin, B.K. (1992). Professional learning through workplace partnerships. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 55* , 61-70.

Lynn, M., & Todoroff, M. (1995). Women's work and family lives. In N. Mandell (Ed.), *Feminist issues: Race, class, and sexuality* (pp. 244-271). Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall.

Lyons, N. (1990). Dilemmas of knowing: Ethical and epistemological dimensions of teachers' work and development. *Harvard Educational Review, 60* (2), 159-180.

Lyotard, J. (1984). *The post-modern condition: A report on knowledge.* (G. Bennington & B. Massouri, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

MacKeracher, D. & McFarland, J. (1993/94). Learning working knowledge: Implications for training. *Women's education des femmes, 10* (3/4), 54-58.

Mack, J. E. (1992). Psychoanalysis of the self: Toward a spiritual point of view. In L. S. Rouner (Ed.), *Selves, People, and Persons: What does it mean to be a self?* (pp. 169-186). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Maguire, P. (1987). *Doing participatory research: A feminist approach.* Amherst, MA: Center for International Education.

Marsick, V.J. & Watkins, K.E. (1990). *Informal and incidental learning in the workplace.* London: Routledge.

Marsick, V.J., Watkins, K.E., O'Neil, J.O., Dixon, N., & Catalanello, R. (1994). Portrait of a learning organization: Stories from early adopters (pp. 247-252). *Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Council Conference.* Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee.

McConaghy, J. A. (1991). *Teachers' stories and pedagogical insights.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

McMahon, F. (1993). From cop to coach: The shop floor supervisor of the 1990s. In B.J. Caldwell & E.M.A. Carter (Eds.), *The return of the mentor: Strategies for workplace learning* (pp. 9-24). London: The Falmer Press.

Melamed, L. (1987). The role of play in adult learning. In D. Boud & V. Griffin (Eds.), *Appreciating adults learning: From the learner's perspective* (pp. 13-24) . London: Kogan Page.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Merriam, S., & Caffarella, R. (1991). *Learning in adulthood.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S., & Yang, B. (1996). A longitudinal study of adult life experiences and developmental outcomes. *Adult Education Quarterly, 46* (2), 62-81.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. & Associates. (1991). *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Mies, M. (1983). Towards a methodology for feminist research. In G. Bowles and R. Duelli Klein (Eds.), *Theories of women's studies* (pp. 117-139). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mishoe, S.C. (1995). The effects of institutional context on critical thinking in the workplace. *Proceedings of the 36th Annual Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 221-228). Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta.

Moody, R. (1996). *Crystal and dragon: Symmetries in mathematics and nature*. Lecture presented for the J. Gordon Kaplan Excellence in Research award, Edmonton, Alberta.

Moore, T. (1992). *Care of the soul: A guide for cultivating depth and sacredness in everyday life* . New York: Harper Collins.

Morgan, G. (1986). *Images of organization*. London: Sage.

Mott, V. W. (1994). The role of intuition in the reflective practice of adult educators. *Proceedings of the 34th Adult Education Research Council Conference* (pp. 282-288). Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee.

Nielsen, J.M. (Ed.) (1990). *Feminist research methods: Exemplary readings in the social sciences*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Noble, D.D. (1990). High-tech skills: The latest corporate assault on workers. In S. London, E. Tarr, & J. Wilson (Eds.), *The re-education of the American working class*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Newman, J. (1991). *Interwoven conversations: Learning and teaching through critical reflection*. Toronto, ON: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Press.

Oliver, Harold H. (1992). The relational self. In L.S. Rouner (Ed.), *Selves, people, and persons: What does it mean to be a self?* (pp. 37-51). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Orner, M. (1992). Interrupting the calls for student voice in "liberatory" education": A feminist poststructuralist perspective. In C. Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp.74-89). New York: Routledge.

Ottmann, H. (1982). Cognitive interests and self-reflection. In J. B. Thompson & D. Held (Eds.), *Habermas: critical debates* (pp. 143-166). London: Macmillan.

Owens, R.G. (1982). Methodological rigor in naturalistic inquiry: Some issues and answers. *Education Administration Quarterly, 18* (2), 1-21.

Pagano, J. (1990). *Exiles and communities: Teaching in the patriarchal wilderness* . Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Peck, R.S. (1994). *A world waiting to be born: Civility rediscovered*. New York: Bantam.

Perry, B. A. (1994). *A description of exceptionally competent nursing practice*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

Perry, W. (1970). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Pinar, W.F. (1992). Autobiography and architecture of self. In W.F. Pinar (Ed.) *Autobiography, politics, and sexuality. Essays in curriculum theory 1972-1992* (pp. 201-222). New York: Peter Lang.

Pinar, W.F., Reynolds, W.M., Slattery, P., & Taubman, P.M. (1995). *Understanding curriculum: An introduction to the study of historical and contemporary curriculum discourses* . New York: Peter Lang.

Plumb, D. (1995). Critical adult education and identity in postmodernity. *Proceedings of the 36th Annual Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 241-248). Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta.

Polanyi, M. (1966). *The tacit dimension.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Prawat, R.S. (1993). The value of ideas: Problems versus possibilities in learning. *Educational Researcher*, August-September, 5-16.

Probst, R.E. (1988). *Response and analysis: Teaching literature in junior and senior high school* . Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Redding, J.C. & Catalanello, R.F. (1994). *Strategic readiness: The making of the learning organization*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Revans, R.W. (1980). *Action learning*. London: Blond & Briggs.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Said, E.W. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Random House.

Saul, J.R. (1995). *The unconscious civilization*. New York: Aninsi.

Schlossberg, N.K. (1984). *Counseling adults in transition*. New York: Springer.

Schön, D.A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.

Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for learning and teaching in the professions.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques* . Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Schubert, W. H. (1992). Our journeys into teaching: Remembering the past. In W.H. Schubert & W.C. Ayers (Eds.), *Teacher lore: Learning from our own experience* (pp.3-10). New York: Longman.

Schulman, L. S. (1988). The dangers of dichotomous thinking in education. In P.P. Grimmett & G.L. Erickson (Eds.), *Reflection in teacher education* (pp. 31- 38). Vancouver, BC: Pacific Educational Press.

Selman, M. (1988). Schön's gate is square, but is it art? In P.P. Grimmett & G.L. Erickson (Eds.), *Reflection in teacher education* (pp. 177-192). Vancouver, BC: Pacific Educational Press.

Senge, P. (1991). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* New York: Doubleday.

Senge, P.M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R.B., Smith, B.J. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization.* New York: Doubleday.

Silvers, R.J. Discourse in a search for a communicative relationship. In V. Darroch & R. Silvers (Eds), *Interpretive human studies: An introduction to phenomenological research* (pp. 173-214). Lanham, MD: United Press of America.

Stanley, L. & Wise, S. (1983). *Breaking out: Feminist consciousness and feminist research* . London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Steiner, G. (1989). *Real presences.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Sternberg, R.J. (1988). *The triarchic mind: A new theory of human intelligence.* New York: Viking Penguin.

Stewart, T. A. (1994). Your company's most valuable asset: Intellectual capital. *Fortune* (October 3, 1994), 68-74

Sugarman, L. (1986). *Life-span development: Concepts, theories, and interventions.* New York: Methuen.

Sumara, D. (1993). *Fictives and teacher identity: On the importance of unmasking* . Paper presented at JCT conference on curriculum theory and classroom practice, Dayton, OH.

Swardson, R. (1995). Greetings from the electronic plantation. In T.Fenwick (Ed.), *Work and leisure* (pp. 149-156). Toronto, ON: McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

Tannen, D. (1990). *Talking voices: Repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversational discourse* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tannen, D. (1990). *Talking from 9 to 5 - Women and men in the workplace: Language, sex, and power*. New York: Avon Books.

Tauber, A. I. (1992). The organismal self in its philosophical context. In L.S. Rouner (Ed.), *Selves, people, and persons: What does it mean to be a self?* (pp. 149-168). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Taubman, P. (1992). Achieving the right distance. In W.F. Pinar & W.M. Reynolds (Eds.) *Understanding the curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text* . (pp.216-236). New York: Teachers College Press.

Taylor, K. (1995). Sitting beside herself: Self-assessment and women's adult development. In K. Taylor & C. Marienau, (Eds.), *Learning environments for women's adult development: Bridges toward change* . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Thomas, K.W. (1976). Conflict and conflict management. In M.D. Dunnette (Ed.), *The handbook of industrial and organizational psychology*. Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing.

Thomson, A. (1995). Starting with self: life history approaches to training adult educators. *Proceedings of the 25th Annual Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults* (pp. 101-103). Southampton, UK: University of Southampton.

Thrift, N., & Pile, S. (1995). *Mapping the subject: geographies of cultural transformation*. London: Routledge.

Tough, A. (1971). *The adults' learning projects: A fresh approach to theory and practice in adult learning*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Tremmel, R. (1993). Zen and the art of reflective practice in teacher education. *Harvard Educational Review, 63* (4), 434-458.

Usher, R. (1989). Locating experience in language: Towards a poststructuralist theory of experience. *Adult Education Quarterly, 40* (1), 23-32.

Usher, R. (1995). Telling the story of self: Deconstructing the self of the story. *Proceedings of the 25th Annual Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults*.. Southampton, UK: University of Southampton.

Usher, R. & Edwards, R. (1994). *Postmodernism and education* . London: Routledge.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* . London, Ontario: Althouse Press.

Vattimo, G. (1988). *The end of modernity: Nihilism and hermeneutics in post-modern culture* . London: Polity.

Waldrop, M.M. (1992). *Complexity: The emerging science at the edge of order and chaos*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Washburn, M. (1988). *The ego and the dynamic ground*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Watkins, K., & Marsick, V. (1993). *Sculpting the learning organization: Lessons in the art and science of systemic change*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Welton, M. (1991). *Toward development work: The workplace as a learning environment.* Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press.

West, L. (1995). Revisioning the self . *Proceedings of the 25th Annual Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults* (pp. 119-122). Southampton, UK: University of Southampton.

Westkott, N. (1990). Feminist criticism of the social sciences. In J.M. Nielsen (Ed.). *Feminist research methods: Exemplary readings in the social sciences* (pp. 58-68). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Wlodkowski, R.J. (1986). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Zuboff, S. (1988). *In the age of the smart machine: The future of work and power*. New York: Basic Books.

Appendix A: Consent Form and Letter to Participants

Participant Consent

An Exploration of Continuous Learning in the Workplace

a Doctoral Study proposed by Tara Fenwick
Department of Educational Policy Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

I understand that the purpose of this doctoral study is to explore stories of how people change and improve their practice in the workplace. The research will involve one or more personal interviews with me during 1994-95, and observation of my practice in the workplace.

I understand that my interviews will be tape-recorded, transcribed, and analysed. I will have the opportunity to review these transcripts and make any deletions/additions/changes that I wish. I may choose to share with Tara Fenwick some of my reflective writing about my learning. This will be analysed and may become part of the final report.

I understand that every effort will be made to protect my anonymity and confidentiality in the transcripts and final report. These transcripts and my reflective writing will not be shared with anyone besides the researcher, Tara Fenwick, without my permission. My name and any identifying references will be deleted from the transcripts and only used in the final report if I decide I want to include them. I will have the opportunity to review and ask for revisions to the interpretation of my experiences as they are represented in the final report of the study.

I understand that I do not need to share any information or feelings that I would prefer to keep private. I am free to withdraw from this study at any time if I choose.

I hereby freely consent to serve in this study. I give my permission for Tara Fenwick to tape-record, transcribe, and analyse my interviews under the conditions outlined above. I also give my permission for Tara Fenwick to review and use in this study any reflective writing of mine that I choose to share with her, under the conditions outlined above.

________________________________ ____________
Signature Date

Letter to Participants

Dear [name]:

I am writing to provide a quick up-date of the study on "Continuous Learning in the Workplace" in which you have agreed to participate.

First of all, thank you again for taking the time to speak at length with me on [date] about your learning biography. I am now awaiting the transcripts of that first interview. As soon as the typist has them ready for me, I'll call you to arrange a follow-up interview. Even if you don't have time for a further interview, I want you to have a chance to look over the transcripts and make any changes or deletions that you'd like.

I expect to be able to call you before Christmas. I truly enjoyed our first conversation, [name], and I'm looking forward to talking further with you about your learning and changing through your work. In the meantime, have a very happy holiday season.

Sincerely,

Tara J. Fenwick

Appendix B: Questions Guiding the Research Conversations

1. Following are the questions I listed for myself before beginning the conversations with participants. The questions were for my purposes, to help me think through ways to probe a participant's telling of her work history, and to elicit critical incidents about her learning in work. Into each interview I took with me only one index card on which I had written a few key words for myself, reminding me to probe some of these questions when I had the opportunity. No single research conversation addressed all or even most of these questions.

Work History:

Tell me about your work now. What do you do? What is your work community like? What is most meaningful to you about what you do now?

Tell me about your first job. What did you do? How did you learn what you were to do? Were there any significant people in your work-life? Why do you remember them? Why did you leave that job?

Where did you work next? (or, Who did you work with after that? or, What did you do then?) Tell me about it. . . .

And where did you work after that? (or, Who did you work with after that? or, What did you do then?) Tell me about it. . . .

Critical incidents of work-learning:

Tell about a recent time in your work when you felt uncertain but had to act.

Tell about a recent change that was introduced in your workplace.

Tell about something you know or can do now that wasn't a part of your practice five years ago. How do you know it? How did you learn it?

Recall yourself in practice over the past week. What are the most important knowings underlying your behaviors? How are these different from your practice five or ten years ago?

Tell about a time when you were thrown into a completely unfamiliar situation, or when you had to design a new task to produce a particular outcome.

Think of a dilemma you faced recently. What did you choose to do? How did you make that choice?

Tell about the last time you remember consciously learning a new skill or set of skills in practice.

2. Before the second research conversation I usually reviewed the transcripts of my first conversation with a participant, then wrote questions I particularly wanted to ask as part of the talk which would unfold in our second meeting. Sometimes I wanted to remember to find out information about early work history that had not emerged in the first conversation, sometimes I wanted to probe further about a comment or reference made by a participant in the first transcript. Below is a sample. These are the questions I jotted to myself before seeing Elizabeth for the second time:

Her M.Ed. program:
her expectations compared to the actual experience?
what were some of the most valuable learnings for her
process of program - how suited to her needs?

Her long past work life:
which period produced the greatest learning?
what were the most valuable things you learned in this period?
how did you learn them? (PROCESS, role of reflection, dialogue)
what triggered the specific learning? (MOTIVE)
how do you decide what is valuable learning for you?
mistakes...
one or two people who had significant impact on your learning
-what kind of impact? what was the process?

Compared to a recent period of high learning in work...
WHAT did you learn of value - how do you decide value now compared to earlier
HOW did you learn it
WHY did you learn it (MOTIVE)
WHO affected your learning

"I seek a new challenge, then look for ways to develop the skills"
-what are some of these challenges - recently?
-why these and not others? (what makes a worthwhile challenge for her?)
- what's a skill you've developed that you value? Trace the process of its development.

A work situation when learning slowed or shut down for you: what happened? external influences? internal influences? what emotional/behavioral responses did you notice in yourself? how did you cope?

"Work is not separate from life, work IS my life". How does she define Work? Workplace? Relation between learning and work and knowledge?
What kind of work gives her most pleasure? most displeasure?
How does domestic and relationship work fit into her conceptualization of work/life/learning?

Appendix C: Themes and Categories Yielded in First Analysis

I. THE WOMEN'S CHARACTERISTICS

A. The Women's Values ("The Bottom Line")
  -seeking constantly to learn more
  -seeking constantly to know the self
  -hard work - "150%" - perfectionism

B.The Women's Learning Skills and Abilities, Understandings, Needs and Preferences
  -inner resources of creativity
  -asking why questions
  -creative: making connections between unlike things to generate new meaning
  -reflective: willing to analyse past experience
  -here and now awareness
  -initiative: ask for new tasks and challenges, ask questions
  -intuitive: struggle to hear the inner voice
  -resourceful: find a starting place for tackling a challenge, then find resources
  -courageous: Take risks. "I can learn anything"
  -patience: with own learning process. "Things take time".
  -hunger for change: "I wither and die without change". Actively seek change.

II. THE PROCESS OF LEARNING

A. ALERT TO THE QUESTION - DISJUNCTURE
  -sensing a problem
  -taking responsibility for raising the questions and following through

B (1). INTENTIONALITY
  -caring about something, finding "passion" within it
  -life purpose drives attention to this rather than that
  -servanthood, obsession to help others

B (2). TIMING
  - serendipity: listening for and taking unexpected opportunities to learn
  - learning to wait upon rhythms outside yourself
  - coping with sense of being "out of time" in your career history

D . READINESS TO LEARN - POSITIONALITY
  -needs for structure and for freedom are met
  -the experience resonates with your intentions at that moment
  -positioning yourself as "humble" and open to the object of learning

E. LEARNING AS MEANING MAKING - SELF
  -interpreting the experience
  -investing self within the experience
  -incremental meanings unfold in work, not transformative ruptures

III. SOURCES OF LEARNING VALUES, SKILLS, AND CAPABILITIES

A. Formal learning. Continuous courses
B. People. Role models in early work experience. Dialogue and Listening to people.
C. Positive work experiences. Successes, project completions.

D. Family of origin. Values of "Work hard", "Be independent and self-reliant", "Find happiness"
E. Painful work experiences. Mistakes and reflection, but only when there's support.
F. Observing others. Especially watching different points of view and working styles.

IV. STRATEGIES WORKING WITH OTHER LEARNERS

A. Demonstration, with the "whys".
B. Working alongside. "Being with". Offering your presence.
C. Patience. Stopping to answer questions, show your own thinking and source of interest
D. Accepting learner's preferences, taste, unique directions, even if these are not your own
E. Creating community, understanding difference.
F. Helping others see and hear the world.
G. Generating conversation among, rather than explanation to.

V. APPROACHES TO LEARNING FROM THE WORKING COMMUNITY.

A. Sense of being part of whole greater than self
B. The service mentality-- wanting to contribute
C. Wanting to share, not gain - also the Christian ethic
D. Empathy - caring for others, sensing their needs and wanting to respond
E. Being a student of others - learning from others' experiences too
F. Watching and learning from others - learning how to trust someone else
G. Accept diversity, even welcome it
H. Learning who you work with best/ learn from most
I. Valuing camaraderie, community, rapport and mutual reciprocal psychological support
J. Dialogue: value info sharing across boundaries, talking to solve problems

Appendix D: Selected Transcript Samples

Below are two samples of transcripts of research conversations tape-recorded for this study.

The first illustrates what I consider to be a rather conventional approach to research interviewing, that is typical of my early conversations with most participants. The researcher is always questioning, probing ideas offered by the participant, to evoke into words the participant's "story". The researcher probes details that occur to her at the time of the conversation (and her frame of thinking at that time), and neglects to probe details that upon careful examination of the transcript are obviously more germane to the participant's sense of the story. Thus the story becomes shaped in a very particular way.

The second transcript sample illustrates a way of conversing with participants that is more characteristic of the later meetings I had with them. The dialogue tends to flow more naturally between researcher and researched. Both ask questions of the other, although I still asked most of the questions. I became more comfortable sharing my responses to what participants were saying, telling them the sense I was making, and asking them interpretive questions as these occurred to me.

Transcript sample one

Tara: What other factors were going on for you that made it such a powerful learning? (Participant has been describing what she calls a transformative learning experience, in university course entitled "Ecofeminism"):

Participant: Well, it was a horrible year. That was '92. That was the year my brother died. He was very ill…I took that course from January 'til April of that year. Also my husband's best friend had cancer and died in March. And it was my last term. And I was carrying [full? four?] courses, including Stats. There was more transformation happened in Stats. It was a, you know, it was a horrible year. I was, I was 25 years older than anyone else in the course.

Tara: How does that affect you?

Well, I think that the young people have grown up with a different way of thinking about…these women, particularly, had come through Women's Studies. So they'd been looking at these issues for much longer than I had. There were some men in the course too, who I think felt threatened occasionally by these angry women. But I think it was age. I mean, I…I just had a whole comfortable belief and action system in place that I thought was going to do me for the rest of my life.

Tara: So going back to the refresher course, there wasn't a, any kind of a challenge or a change there?

No…no. I was going back to do the same things I was doing. You know, that I'd been doing. So, and I didn't actually, after the refresher course we moved to the farm. And I didn't work for a year. And then my friend started to work earlier than I. Even when I went back to nursing…

Tara: I was going to ask, did you find yourself doing things in a different manner?

No, no. I was most comfortable doing them the same way, because…certainly the hands-on kinds of things, that's…I figured that that was good. I didn't have any problem with that. After I graduated, I took a job.. It was a temporary job setting up a share care unit, what they call a share care unit. And I took it because I thought there'd be some, a lot of patient education and I was beginning to be aware that patient education was an important component of rehab.

Tara: What was beginning to tell you that?

There's a lot of teaching that goes into…hadn't been formalized or recognized…nurses have always done teaching, they just haven't…recorded, they aren't recognized for doing it, that isn't a time component. But it was supposed to be in this new unit. And that was a new challenge for me, because there was going to be one R.N. and some L.P.N.'s (the Licensed Practical Nurses). The patients were going to be fairly independent when they came there. We were going to do a contract with them ...I spent so much time in organizational and administration part of this thing and trying to fight for it, to get it established that I didn't get a lot of time to do patient care. But even there, you once asked me a question about what stood out in the back and I don't know whether I ever answered it. And it was patients. And even there, when I think about it, there's one patient.

Tara: Okay. . . . (nodding)

And all the way along, that's what stands out, are patients. All the way, from the very beginning of training on, it was patients. But [in particular] there was a girl that had an amputation that, and she was my daughter's age, it was really an ugly dressing to do and she knew it was ugly…She was kind of a tough kid, she'd been in a bad accident on a motorcycle…she had tattoos and things on her. But somehow she knew that…there was something. There was a connection….

Tara: Yes. . . (pause) What's an "ugly dressing"?

Her leg was infected. The [inaudible] wasn't healing, the bones…an above-knee amputation…And for her it was, she had a new boyfriend and it was really important that she be attractive…it was just a tough time for her. It was smelly and…I once said, maybe to my daughter, "anyone can be a nurse. Anyone can take someone to the bathroom and wash their bottom. But a good nurse will take them to the bathroom and wash their bottom and they will still have their dignity"… And I guess what it was with that dressing was that I came in and I would talk to her and do the dressing and I would act like it hadn't affected me and it wasn't, like, "ugh"…

Tara: Do some nurses do that?

There's a tendency sometimes. If you don't have empathy. Nurses are becoming technicians. They're also pushing professionalism and so there are certain things they won't do anymore because it's not professional. I've often said I think that nursing has given away some of what they do. They used to be the physios and the O.T.'s and the respiratory therapists and the psychologists. And the floorwashers…

Tara: Mm-hmm…Tell me a bit about, in contrast, the therapeutic touch and the people you've been associated with in that and how that's different for…

Transcript sample two

Participant: I don't know how much to charge. And if I, for example, I find that this program writing is so time-consuming. And I don't know whether I'm slow or whether, you know, I don't know, in other words I don't want people to be paying me a lot of money for something that takes far more time than I need to take to write.

Tara: Yeah, I know how that is. Participant: Do you?

Tara: Oh, yeah. I know exactly what you mean. And not having that balance, that person, or people all around you that you can always kind of unconsciously keep a check on. "What are they doing? How do I fit in with that?" -- Participant: Yeah.

Tara: Like, if everybody else is taking an hour and a half for lunch, you don't have to work all the way through. -- Participant: Yeah.

Tara: It's funny. -- Participant: Yeah, it is, isn't it?

Tara: Yeah, yeah -- And I wonder, is there an issue of self-worth bound up in this? 'Cause you said earlier, you know, money is not really an issue. So I get the sense that when you think about charging it's not in terms of "well, I need X-number of dollars or I want X-number of dollars." Participant: No ...

Tara: I think it's attached to something different here --

Participant: Yeah, but it might be your idea of what is the job…that's more what I'm thinking of. What is the product here, and what is your time worth.

Tara: Now how does the money tie into the worth, the product, or your sense of…

Participant: Well, I guess it's part of what I said too about time. I don't know about this time thing. Like, for example, if, you know in writing a workshop, I always think I should be reading more -- Tara: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm...

Participant: …one more book or whatever. So in doing that, that takes a lot of time to do that…that groundwork. And then of course there's…[rewriting], putting it in a way that somebody else can read it and just actually do the workshop. That takes a long, long time. So how much do you charge for that? I don't know. I really don't know how much to charge for that.

Tara: You know what we need? We need a support network of adult educator contractors, women… Participant: Yeah…

Tara: I keep reading these things about people who are so good at this, right? They sit down and they bluster away. And when I hear what some people charge for their work, you know, like you're saying -- some of these workshops are poor and you find out later that they charged them a lot. And I think we ought to get together and just kind of verify what each other is doing, get a sense of this. And to also find out these issues, like time and preparation. Maybe we could find that doing workshops does take thirty hours prep for one hour delivery … Participant: Yeah, yeah…

Tara: If we knew that…

Participant: Yeah…I would like to know that. It's interesting. I was in the spring, my father-in-law had a brain aneurysm. So he was very, very ill. And I was at the same time supposed to be writing some training stuff…And I was just, I mean, we were at the hospital, intensive care constantly. And it was really hard to concentrate on this workshop. And then I kept telling myself "well, I'm not really doing that much. I'm not really doing that much." And I know that when he hires people he normally pays three hundred dollars…So anyway, I went to help facilitate, I didn't totally facilitate the workshop. And I didn't like the way it went, because the person I was co-facilitating with, first of all, was never on time. You know, people would come back from coffee and we would wait 15 minutes for him to come back. And then I'm trying to work inside his system which is different than mine ... and I just can't stand it. So at any rate when it came time, like, we hadn't agreed on a price to begin with. When it became time to charge…and I was really, when I look back on it…because I was there for the whole weekend. My whole weekend was taken up. And I had spent [all this time], despite the fact that I still think we didn't do a very good job, because I was so preoccupied, it still turned out to be, you know, okay.

Tara: So what is making you now use the word "ridiculous" when you look back on that?

Participant: Well, because I'm working…And I mean, afterwards he said "oh, I couldn't have done it without you"…

Tara: So is that affecting now how you charge now?

Participant: No, I haven't really, I don't know…unless I did have, like, I knew, like, to prepare a workshop, if I knew that it took, I'll never charge $75 a day…I guess it wouldn't affect that…It's just, I think it's like a state of mind…emotional, upset…kind of like "I'll just go get a gun and get it over with." So that was kind of an emotional…so I think no, I wouldn't have charged that much…So I suppose I should learn from that…But I would like to know how long should, how long it should take, if you're developing a three-day workshop, how long should that take? Then that will give me some idea of how much I can charge to do that.

Tara: Yeah. So how do you, how do we, what is billable? Are our research hours billable? And to what extent? And if we say, "well, we could do this number of hours for research, which would give you this quality of product, or this number of hours, which would give you this quality"… Participant: Yeah. Exactly.

Tara: So maybe the client should be able to make the choice about the time we should spend on the project -- but we take that into ourselves, don't we? We make the decisions and then we don't trust our own… Participant: No, no, I don't.

…own criteria for deciding.

Appendix E: Selected Samples of Researcher's Journal

For the sake of those who have not used a journal during research, I enclose samples of my own below. Immediately after each interview I wrote impressions, questions, early hunches about themes, etc. in this journal. I also frequently (usually late at night) turned to the journal to simply pour out feelings that were accumulating during the research. A journal is free-writing - not spell-checked or grammatically standardized in form. I rarely re-read the journal. In preparing this appendix, I read for the first time many paragraphs where I could clearly see early ideas being worked out that later formed important themes in this thesis. I also in this journal discovered a valuable record of the research experience (the more tortuous parts of which I seem to have conveniently forgotten until now), that I hope will serve me well when it's my turn to help beginning researchers.

October, 1995

Just finished the interview with [participant] and wrote up a list of the themes that seem most striking now. But just had to write about other stuff, it was an amazing experience-
1. I felt very peaceful, like I was getting lessons in life listening to this woman talk about what was important. Also a sense of security - this is real. And - privileging time for reflection and inner work (marilyn also does this - witness the web on her whiteboard) is legitimate! Fighting my own inner demons here that constantly try to rip me out of my comfortable little womb of inner reflection - that's wasting time. Get one with 'stuff" - i.e. "doing".
2. I found myself making all kinds of personal connections as she talked. Comparing past experiences that were similar to hers, admiring choices she'd made that were more courageous than ones i'd made, and - especially - admiring both Janis and Marilyn's insight and self-awareness - and willingness and courage to take - make time for learning from oneself. Also that they both labeled and took pride in such - from another persepctive - small things! Building a swimming pool - became a big project to take pride in. Making a four-minute film for a country fantasy tune - a four-year project.

What counts as "important", and worth doing?
This project has me asking a lot - what is it I really care about??
-I'm finding:
-that many of thes people share with me certain characteristics - this is almost scary, as though I've naively selected people that my internal radar is attracted to: most or them have a strong spiritual life, often based in Christian morality and principles; most are very reflective and second -guess their own performance a lot (which as Elana said is the source of a lot of reflection); most like to write and think as a way of learning; many are government employees!!
-I'm also experiencing difficulty separating , during the interviews, from my own anxieties about my own career, my work goals and purposes, my lack of a secure and stable work environment -- identity

-I find, for instance, that as I listen to [participant] I wish I were doing her job, although I take inspiration from her attitude (particularly her imagininzing herself as a 70 year old!!) I compare myself to her age and think, if she can be this positive at 50, with all the changes she's facing, and focus on toadies work when she's outta here in 3 years - what's amatter with me, eh?
I listen to Carolyn and think about her supervisor - wondering how i can integrate that sort of attitude (avoiding personalizing everything, turning things into learning

opportunities without worrying about feeling personally threatened -- tackling tough issues, challenging statements at the risk of losing rapport, calling spades, and now out there consulting). I listen to Fran and admire her and try to imagine myself in her life out on the ranch, at the beck and call of her adult kids -- I feel guilty at my own comparative lack of responsibility for others - - I settle into the whole ethos of her gentle, comforting, selfless nurturing approach to people

-I listen to marilyn and feel empowered, admiring her Christian sense of unwavering confidence and mission -- her courage, her risk-taking, her sense of take-charge and take initiative and get out there and DO IT

-I can't help comparing myself to these people, trying on their lives and careers and sniffing life and people from their vantage points - I feel as though I've unprofessionally abandoned my role as researcher when I feel these things

-I also feel very worried that the interviews are "going all over the place" - I follow the line of talk a participant seems most interested in - attempting to avoid imposing stuff on them, like barriers or colleagues etc. - and leave wondering what it is I'm researching, after all? At this point (finished 6 interviews - I feel at sixes and sevens. I'm about to sit down and find cross-themes in their words - I suppose this might be premature, for I'm not consciously applying any particular perspective to analysing their talk (i.e. radical structuralist etc.)

-I'm also still sticking with women, mainly because I feel better with them?

_i find myself avoiding setting up interview times with some of the women like [participant] because she has such a hard edge. Am I still so "fragile" that I personalize to the extent where I am not a bit reliable or trustworthy as an "instrument"?